ESCHATOLOGY IN NEW ENGLAND: 1700-1763

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation begins with two propositions: one, that eighteenth century New England divines spent an inordinate amount of time studying Biblical prophecies; and two, that the resulting sermons and treatises which discussed these prophecies often seem strange and obscure—to modern readers at least. The dissertation attempts to unravel the logic behind New England eschatology and determine how the millennial perspective helped shape the broader social concerns of the men who shared it.

My research indicates that eighteenth century New Englanders made remarkably consistent use of eschatology. They did so in part because the book of Revelation contained a remarkably coherent interpretation of history. John's prophecy taught first century Christians that although Rome continued to persecute them, God's plan had not been thwarted. The suffering of the righteous played an essential part in the drama, and only after these trials of the faithful would Christ reign for a thousand years. Thus John's vision comforted and strengthened wavering Christians.

Eighteenth century expositors used these themes as a framework for interpreting their own times. They had little success in devising a consistent system of prophetic interpretation, and so continued to differ on the meaning and order of specific Biblical predictions. But everyone agreed that prophecies were meant to support "the faith and constancy of the church in every state of affliction." In that sense, interpretations of the Revelation functioned as theodicies of comfort: explaining God's chastisements and holding out the millennium as a time when the righteous would finally rule the earth. But by casting that theodicy in the form of a history, and by equating days of progress with days of affliction, divines insured that millennial rhetoric would be more than a salve which could be readily forgotten as soon as events improved. The bad times were the good times, just as humiliation and conviction were the encouraging and necessary steps on an individual's road to salvation. New Light interpretations of the Great Awakening made this especially clear. In sum, the afflictive model of progress was an integral part of New England theology because it shaped history to the pattern of life through death which was so meticulously elaborated in the traditional morphology of conversion, and which was at the heart of Christianity itself.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Yale University today is not the hotbed of millennialism it was when Jonathan Edwards and Timothy Dwight passed through its doors. Today's students do not make a habit of perusing volumes like Thomas Burnet's Sacred Theory of the Earth; even less would they be likely to note in the margin their own modifications of his hypotheses. (At one point, Burnet explained that the pre-millennial conflagration inevitably entailed the destruction of all animals. "Except Salamanders," noted one eighteenth century Yalie, apparently unaware that Pliny had long ago scotched that old wives' tale.)

Yet it cannot be said that eschatology is dead at Yale. My own study of eighteenth century prophetic thought has had the benefit of kind and generous advice from a number of faculty members who shared my interest in the implications of millennial perspectives. I began research on the subject in a seminar paper written for Professor David D. Hall; he has been good enough to supply me with incisive comment and criticism, even after he assumed other teaching responsibilities at Boston University. Professors Sydney Ahlstrom and David Davis have also been most helpful in their discussions of the subject with me. Above all, I owe a great debt to Edmund Morgan for his encouragement and detailed reading of the

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I would also like to thank the libraries of Yale and Harvard Universities for their assistance, and especially the staff at the Beinecke Rare Book Library; also the libraries of the American Antiquarian Society and the Massachusetts Historical Society.

Needless to say, the reader is warned not to impugn any of the above-mentioned persons or institutions through the dubious process of guilt by association. I assume all responsibility for errors, sins of omission and commission, or any other faults the dissertation bears.

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It was the best of times, it was the worst of times...it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way....

--Charles Dickens

Chapter 1

REVELATION

I

Sometime near the end of the first century A.D., a little book began circulating among a number of Christian churches in Asia. Its author, who identified himself only as John, a servant of Christ, wished it passed from church to church and read aloud among gatherings of the faithful. Just who John was is difficult to discover. Some traditions claimed he was Jesus' beloved disciple John, son of Zebadee; others, that he had been an elder for some time in the church at Ephesus.[1]

Ultimately, his message mattered more than his identity. Whoever John was, he showed an acute awareness of the problems early Christians faced and the tidings they were longing to hear. For those who gave total allegiance to a crucified and risen Lord, living under the protection of the imperial rule of Rome was difficult indeed. Romans demanded more than political loyalty to the state. Subjects were

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[1]The historical background of the Revelation can be found in Robert H. Charles, A Critical History of the Doctrine of a Future Life (2nd ed., rev. and enl., London, 1913), Chapters 9-10; or in any competent introduction to the New Testament, such as Paul Feine, Johannes Behm and Georg Kümmel, Introduction to the New Testament, trans. by A. J. Matill, Jr. (Nashville, 1966).

required to participate in cultic rituals whose deities included not only the goddess Roma but also a pantheon of past Roman emperors. At first, Christians were not hard pressed to decide how to deal with the conflict. Jews had always refused to participate in such idolatrous worship, and Rome yielded to their stubbornness by exempting them from the practice. Since Christians were regarded at first as a group of Jewish sectaries, they too were granted the exemption.

But the religion spread, and as Gentile converts began to outnumber Jews, Rome revised its opinion. Persecution of Christians began in earnest under the reign of Domitian, whose paranoia fed a demand for total obedience. Domitian preferred to be addressed as "dominus ac deus noster," which for Christians put the issue in the boldest possible relief. Which man were they to swear was "our Lord and God"—a crucified yet supposedly risen Jesus, or an emperor who had the power to persecute, imprison and kill them if they did not?

John chose loyalty to Christ, and for his troubles was exiled to Patmos, a rocky little island about five by ten miles long in the Aegean. But his faith was exceptionally strong; for many, exile, prison or death was a frightening prospect. Was not compromise of some sort possible? Surely, if it were a case of life or death, paying lip-service to a Roman Caesar was the most sensible solution. Or perhaps it was wiser to give up belief in a risen Christ entirely. If He was indeed Lord over all the nations, why were Christians persecuted wherever they went? How was it that evil men like

Domitian and Nero were allowed to reign unchecked? John was quite aware that these questions would inevitably be asked; and if his position in the church had been one of authority before his exile, he would quite naturally have felt a responsibility to strengthen the resolve of those who wavered. That was precisely the effect he hoped his book would have.

Its title is simply the Apocalypse (or Revelation) to John, "Apocalypse" being a transliteration of a Greek verb's substantive form meaning "an uncovering." (Re-vel-ation: re = un, vel = veil; hence, an unveiling.) And so John begins,

> The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him to show unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John: who bare record of the word of God and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw.[2]

John reports that he was "in the Spirit" one Sabbath morning, when he heard behind him "a great voice as of a trumpet saying, 'I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia.'" The voice belongs to Christ, who then dictates a series of letters to the churches, admonishing obedience. But these are only a preface to greater disclosures. A loud voice summons John to heaven to view "things which must be hereafter."[3]

Before the heavenly throne, John sees Christ, the Lamb

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[2]Rev. 1:1-2.

[3]Rev. 4:1-2.

who was slain, holding a book shut by seven seals. As the Lamb proceeds to open them, a beast near the throne calls to John with a voice of thunder, to "Come and see." The first seal reveals a rider on a white horse going forth to conquer, and as the remaining ones are opened, similar visions follow. A second horse and rider are red, with power to take peace from the earth; a third, pale, with the power of death. To John, the visions obviously signify present and future plagues unleashed upon the world, and the fifth seal indicates the way troubled Christians react to them. Those who "were slain for the word of God" cry out, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on earth?" The reply is, that "they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled."

And in fact, the Revelation predicts even greater calamities. After the seven seals, another series of visions begins, these under the auspices of seven trumpets. The trumpets predict that burning mountains will fall into the sea; the sun, moon and stars darken; and plagues of locusts descend. Witnesses for Christ will prophesy in sackcloth—the state of affliction—for 1,260 days, after which "the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them." Their

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[4]Rev. 6:9-11.

opponents will leave their bodies in the streets, rejoice over their deaths, and mock them. Like the martyrs of the seven seals, their fate seems to be one of tribulation and trial. But both visions end in triumph. The slain witnesses have the spirit of life breathed into them, and they rise from the dead to ascend into heaven. The martyrs killed under the seven seals are later seen dressed in white robes, rejoicing around the throne of God. Lest his readers have any doubts who these men are, John has an elder of heaven ask him, "What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?" John gives the humble and proper response—"Sir, thou knowest"—and of course, the elder does: "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."[5]

But the Revelation to John goes beyond the mere reassurance that his persecuted comrades will ultimately reign with a triumphant Christ. The unveiling of future events is connected with the larger context of God's great battle with Satan. John sees a vision of a heavenly woman about to give birth to "a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron." But the woman is menaced. A great, red dragon with seven heads and ten horns stands before her, ready to devour her child as soon as it is born. He fails, and the child is taken up by God to his throne.[6] John's readers

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[5]Rev. 11:1-13; 7:9-17. [6]Rev. 12:4-5.

would have little trouble in identifying this as a celestial representation of Jesus' birth. And shortly, the dragon is revealed as none other than "that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world." Although Michael and his angels have succeeded in banishing the dragon from heaven, he is still left free to roam the earth. There, with the assistance of three agents, he makes war with the "remnant" of the heavenly woman's seed—those "which keep the commandments of God, and have [i.e. bear] the testimony of Jesus Christ."[7]

The first of these agents is another seven-headed, ten-horned beast who emerges from the sea; the second is a similar creature who rises from the earth. In other visions, John sometimes seems to combine the two, and for those who later interpreted his book, all such beasts were representations of antichrist, Satan's principle agent on earth. A third enemy appears later, the whore of Babylon, whose full title is written on her forehead: "MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH." She rides atop one of the beasts, and John provides further clues to her earthly identity in a series of obscure hints that only "the mind which hath wisdom" is able to decipher. The most obvious clue is that "The seven heads [of the beast] are seven mountains, upon which the woman sitteth," a reference to the tradition of Rome being founded on seven hills.

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[7]Rev. 12:17.

Satan gives power to all three creatures, and they use it to impress simple multitudes by performing miracles. Thus they attract many followers, and kill "as many as would not worship the image of the beast."[8]

So the lines are clearly drawn between the forces of the Lamb and those of the dragon. Those who swear allegiance to the evil powers have a mark put upon them, either in their right hand or on their forehead; and the servants of God are likewise sealed by an angel of the Lord.[9] In this war, there is no neutral ground, and Christians will be deceiving themselves if they envision compromise as a possibility. Thus the Revelation castigates the church of Laodicea for being "neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot! So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth."[10] God's patience has ended, and John moves from his vision of the beasts to the harvesting of history. Angels pour out the seven vials which contain the seven last plagues.

Here the tempo increases as God's wrath spreads across the world. The first vial brings a plague of sores upon the men who bear the mark of the beast; the second is poured into the sea, and brings death to all that live there. The third turns rivers and fountains into blood, while the fourth

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[8]Rev. 13; Rev. 17.

[9]Rev. 13:15-17; 7:1-8.

[10]Rev. 3:15-16.

causes the sun to scorch the earth. Yet the worshippers of the beast remain unrepentant, even when the fifth vial is poured onto the throne of the beast. Satan's kingdom is threatened, but not destroyed. An angel pours the sixth vial on the river Euphrates, and from out of the mouths of the dragon, the beast and the whore come three "unclean spirits like frogs," who go about the world assembling hosts for a battle at Armageddon. The last vial is poured into the air, and a great voice proclaims, "It is done." Earthquakes, thunder and lightning all signal the fall of Babylon, and John spends an entire chapter describing the harlot's desolation. Princes and kings "who committed fornication and were wanton with her" weep and wail; merchants mourn when they see their trade in ruins; shipmasters and sailors cry with dismay when their source of profit is dried up.[11]

But the faithful rejoice. At the height of the crisis, an angel bids them "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues." And as the saints gather together to praise God, the heavens open, and Christ appears seated on a white horse. This time, it is no meek Lamb, ready to endure persecution. His eyes are "as a flame of fire" and he is "clothed with a vesture dipped in blood." The armies of heaven follow, and in the ensuing war, the beast is thrown alive into the lake of fiery brimstone. Finally, the chief source of mischief,

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[11]Rev. 18:4.

Satan, is seized by an angel and thrown into the bottomless bit, where he is bound for a thousand years. Now the martyrs who had endured so much in earlier persecutions come to life, and reign with Christ for the millennium: a thousand years of peace and prosperity.[12]

The drama, however, is not quite finished. At the end of that time, Satan breaks free of his prison to gather his forces for one last battle led by his minions, Gog and Magog. Only then is he decisively defeated, and joins the beast in the lake of fire where they are "tormented day and night for ever and ever." And with Satan defeated, the world ends with the last judgment. The unfaithful are sentenced to the lake of fire, but those who suffered for Christ go to "a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away."[13] The holy city, also called the New Jerusalem, comes down out of heaven. Together, the Lamb and his followers come to the city, where

> there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever.[14]

So history ends well after all, despite the temporary appearance of desolation. The book closes with Christ assuring

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[12]Rev. 19:19; 20:4-5.

[13]Rev. 20:10; 21:1.

[14]Rev. 22:3-5.

John that what he has seen is true, that the end is indeed near, and that the future should not be kept hidden from the faithful. "Surely I am coming soon," says Jesus, and John's fervent reply is, "Even so, Come Lord Jesus!"[15]

To cynics, John's version of history may seem a trifle too neat. Like so many other inept playwrights, he needed a deus ex machina to get his troubled characters out of a jam. But after all, the deus ex machina never did make an appearance, and the church managed to survive somehow anyway. Certainly John was sincere in believing that little time remained before Christ's second coming; but the Revelation proved able to sustain members of the earthly body of Christ without help from heaven above.

It did so in part because it made the lines of good and evil clear in an ambiguous world. Roman emperors were not men with whom compromise was possible. When wavering Christians considered swearing allegiance or participating in Roman cultic rites, they were forced to think not only of Rome, but of the seven headed beast, the whore of Babylon, and behind both of them, Satan the grand dragon, the ultimate source of evil. John's fantastic imagery wrought a horrible transformation on what might otherwise have seemed merely an unpleasant bureaucracy. And judging by the persistence of the church under continuing persecution, John's ministry was a successful one.

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[15]Rev. 22:6-21.

But successful at what price? Subsequent Christian tradition has insisted that ministry is twofold in character, combining the traits of both priest and prophet. And indeed, John's letters to the seven churches are examples of this combination at work. When he writes Ephesus, he can provide the comfort and assurance of a good priest: "I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience...[and that thou] hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast labored, and hast not fainted." And yet, right upon the heels of this comes prophetic admonition: "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou has left thy first love. Remember therefore, from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works."[16] The other letters follow the same pattern; the alternation of consolation and admonition, of priestly and prophetic, of mercy and judgment. John manages both to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.

But the combination of these two traits is a precarious one for John, because it threatens to disrupt the clear lines he draws between the worlds of good and evil. To see the elect as simultaneously the comfortable and the afflicted, to see mercy and judgment as inseparable, is to grant an ambiguity in the nature of the faithful which does not rest well with a vision of all men marked on the forehead with the seal of the Lamb or the beast. Mercy and judgment are dealt with much more easily if they are separated. Then Christ's

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[16]Rev. 2:2-7.

role in his first coming can be interpreted as primarily one of mercy. Jesus is meek to the end, allowing himself to be crucified for the sins of those who believe in him. But his second coming is one of judgment. The time of mercy has past, and the formerly meek Christ now appears with the armies of heaven, ready to deal with the sins of the world in a radically different way.

Hence we find a tension in the Revelation which is illustrated, for instance, by John's vision of the slain martyrs. Resurrected, they appear in heaven gathered around the throne of God in white robes, "washed" and made "white in the blood of the Lamb." But just what does this mean? One traditional Christian answer is that the blood which Christ removes from the robe by shedding his own blood is the sin of the one who wears the robe. In that case, the mercy shown is also a judgment upon the unworthiness of the elect. But with John, the case seems different. The blood here points not to the sins of the martyrs, but to the sins of those who slay them. And if that is the case, mercy is easily separated from judgment, and comfort from affliction. For in the end, martyrdom earns mercy by virtue of the act itself; and judgment is saved for the sins of those who have slain in service to the beast. The perspective is simpler, cleaner, and infinitely more comforting—at least to those wearing the white robes.

II

This dissertation concerns eighteenth century New England, not first century Asia Minor. Yet the preface is necessary because in this case, eighteenth century New England is closer to the first century than to the twentieth. When the world did not end as soon as John hoped, the church had to decide whether or not to accept his book as a true revelation. That took several centuries, with eminent men on either side of the question; but both Athanasius and Augustine included it in the canon, and serious opposition diminished. New England protestants, like the great majority of Christians before them, believed that the Revelation was indeed from Christ, and that it predicted events which at the time they were revealed had not yet taken place.

To anyone interested in pursuing the social implications of religious thought, New Englanders' acceptance of the Revelation raises two basic questions. First, was this belief an important part of their religion? Some Christians, Calvin among them, agreed that John had been inspired, but professed they hardly knew what to make of his book.[17] Did New Englanders actually give serious attention to it? And secondly, if they did, how did that attention affect their view of the world around them and especially of their fellow men?

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[17]For Calvin's views, see Heinrich Quistorp, Calvin's Doctrines of the Last Things (London, 1955).

A preliminary answer to the first question can be given merely by looking at the lives of two eminent New England divines whose careers spanned the period we are investigating. If the writings of Cotton Mather and Jonathan Edwards are any indication, study of the prophecies was a major activity of eighteenth century theologians. To say that prophetic thought was important to these men is not to say it was also important to most New Englanders—or even to most ministers. But Mather and Edwards were influential men, and the sketches which follow, brief as they are, indicate that the effect of prophetic thought on broader attitudes bears further investigation.

Cotton Mather is familiar to many as one of God's most strenuous creations; what has been less appreciated until recently is that much of that strenuousness was motivated by an interest in Biblical prophecies.[18] Mather often had a sneaking suspicion (and sometimes not so sneaking) that God might be using him as a principal instrument in fulfilling the Revelation. In 1691, he published the first of many sermons dealing with Things To Be Look'd For, a survey of colonial and international events which hinted at how close the world was to Christ's second coming. The following year, A Midnight Cry painted Christ's arrival in vivid terms. Jesus

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[18] Robert Middlekauff's excellent study, The Mathers (Oxford, 1971), clearly indicates this central concern, not only in Cotton but also in his father Increase and grandfather Richard. For Cotton, see especially chapter eighteen, but also all of Book III.

would "become Visible unto this lower World, and make the Sky to rattle with his rapid peals of Thunder, the Mountains to tremble before his Lightnings, and the Hills and Rocks to melt at the presence of his Majesty," and would also "by a terrible Conflagration make a New Earth, whereon the Escaped Nations are to walk in the Light of that Holy City [, the New Jerusalem]." Nor was this a dream for the distant future. Mather was convinced the world was "doubtless very near the Last Hours of that Wicked One," and his own calculations indicated antichrist might fall as soon as 1697.[19]

Long hours of study stood behind this conclusion. Mather, like his father Increase, was familiar with writings on the Revelation from the early church fathers down to the numerous seventeenth century commentaries. Often, he would copy relevant portions of these tracts and discuss their merits in his "Biblia Americana," a six volume manuscript dealing with critical issues raised by the scriptures. He compiled his own detailed scenario of the end of history in another unpublished manuscript, "Triparadisus."[20] Prayer was also a part of Mather's concern for the coming Kingdom; and the sabbath, a particularly appropriate time for such activity. Sunday was the seventh day of the week, when God had rested after creating the world, and thus "a Peculiar Type and Sign of the Millennium," when the world itself would

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[19]Cotton Mather, A Midnight Cry (Boston, 1692), pp. 23, 24.

[20]"Biblia Americana," MS, Massachusetts Historical Society; "Triparadisus," MS, American Antiquarian Society.

finally be at rest. Both before and after dinner (when he was not at church), Mather would study prophetic commentaries, read scripture, make "suitable Ejaculations," and sing a hymn on the subject, concluding with a prayer while he was "Prostrate in the Dust...for Zion in the Dust, and for the Hastening of the Day of God."[21] He called the whole process "Indefatigable Sabbatizing," and indefatigable it was. As 1697 approached, he resolved to set time aside for daily prayer on the subject, just as the prophet Daniel had done.[22] He was so successful with these "extraordinary Supplications" that he often received what he called "Particular Faiths" from God —an assurance that a wish strongly prayed for would be granted. Thus he reported that Christ had "informed, inclined, and assisted" him "to foresee, and putt on that Work of His."[23]

Mather's response to this revelation was greater and greater activity. In addition to the numerous publications touching the subject, he began to hold meetings in his study once every two weeks for a "select" group of Christians who were interested in the "Approaches of the Kingdome of our Lord Jesus Christ." He somehow took time ("a few liesure

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[21]William R. Manierre II, ed., The Diary of Cotton Mather for the Year 1712 (Charlottesville, 1964), p. 69. See also the Diary of Cotton Mather, Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society (2 vols.; 7th ser., VII-VIII; Boston, 1911-12), I, 337 (hereafter cited as Mather, Diary).

[22]Mather, Diary, I, 261.

[23]Ibid., I, 224.

Minutes in the Evening of every Day") to learn Spanish in three weeks in order to prepare a pamphlet on the articles of the Protestant faith. His hope was to help spread the true gospel throughout Spanish America, as prophesied in scripture.[24] A similar interest prevailed towards the Indians, only in this case he relied on others to do the translating. And since the Revelation predicted that in the last days the Jews would recognize Christ as their Lord and Saviour, Mather was always on the lookout for news of conversions, and composed manuals to promote them. Of course, God would see that most Jews remained blind to the faith until just before the very end; but in the meantime, the trickle of conversions would help Christians in their "Looking Out, for the blessed Revolution which is to come."[25]

An end to all things did not come in 1697, but Mather was not discouraged. Prophetic calculations were difficult to get exactly right. Further research convinced him that the time would not come until around 1736; later he moved the date to 1716. At times his meditations rose to ecstatic heights in anticipation of the Holy Spirit which angels would spread throughout the world: "They are coming! They are coming! They are coming! They will quickly be upon us; and the

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[24] Ibid., I, 284-85.

[25] Hence Cotton's perverse logic, not to mention tact, when he told Jews, "One thing that satisfies us Christians, in the truth of Christianity, is your obstinate Aversion to that Holy Religion." The Faith of the Fathers (Boston, 1699), p. 3; American Tears (Boston, 1701), pp. 57ff.

World shall be shaken wonderfully!"[26] Disappointment again came in 1717, but not disillusionment. Until his death in 1728, he continued to pray and hope for the arrival of Christ's kingdom.

Mather's death was followed the next year by that of another influential minister, Solomon Stoddard; and Northampton chose his grandson, Jonathan Edwards, to replace him. Like Mather, Edwards made prophecies the subject of private study as well as public discourse. Early in his career he composed a list of "Books To Be Inquired For" which included "The Best Exposition of the Apocalypse"; and by the summer of 1723, he decided the subject merited enough attention to warrant keeping a separate notebook on it. Thus his "Notes on the Apocalypse" was begun.[27] Edwards added to this for the rest of his life, working out his own theories about various prophecies, and often copying excerpts from the other sources he read. Since many of the prophetic commentaries were not easily available in New England, he drew upon Matthew Poole's Synopsis Criticorum, a survey in Latin of forty divines' positions on the Revelation.[28]

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[26]Mather, Diary, VIII, p. 366.

[27]Edwards' list of books is quoted in Stephen Stein, "'Notes on the Apocalypse,' by Jonathan Edwards" (2 vols.; unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1970), I, 49. Edwards' "Notes" will soon be published in the Yale Edition of his works. Stephen Stein's thorough research into Edwards' apocalyptic views has been of great help to me, and his work on the "Notes" provides Edwards scholars with an important but hitherto neglected source.

[28]Stein, "Notes," I, 99.

Stoddard's death meant more time had to be spent in pastoral duties, and of course Edwards soon found himself in the midst of an awakening greater than any his grandfather had managed. News of it spread, and Londoners like Isaac Watts and John Guyse saw the revival as a token of even greater ones promised in the prophecies. The Boston ministers who wrote a preface to the Faithful Narrative agreed, calling it "an Earnest of what God will do towards the Close of the Gospel Day."[29] And when similar awakenings spread across New England in 1740, Edwards was at his most enthusiastic. Christ's original mission had been accomplished in the Old World, so it made sense that his second, spiritual coming would commence in the New. And in that case, would not the "most likely" place be New England? It seemed probable that the revivals were "the dawning, or at least a prelude, of that Glorious work of God, so often foretold in Scripture, which in the progress and issue of it shall renew the world of mankind."[30]

Hence Edwards, like Mather, was always on the lookout for tell-tale signs of the times. He admitted he "had great longings for the advancement of Christ's kingdom in the

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[29]For Watts and Guyse, see their preface to A Faithful Narrative (3rd ed.; Boston, 1738), iii. The Boston ministers wrote a separate preface for the same edition, from which they are quoted, iv.

[30]Some Thoughts on the Revival of Religion, in Works of President Edwards (4 vols.; reprint of the Worcester Edition; New York, 1849), III, 313 (hereafter cited as Edwards, Works).

world"; and that he was "eager to read public news-letters, mainly for that end, to see if I could not find some news favorable to the interest of religion in the world."[31] The "Notes on the Apocalypse" dutifully recorded advances and setbacks of the Protestant interest in Europe as well as in America: Spain's trade seemed to be languishing; a new poll tax in France caused "surprise and consternation among the people"; a Jesuit house was struck by lightning and the library consumed.[32] Similarly, Edwards' correspondence with Scottish ministers discussed such standard prophetic questions as whether the French loss at Cape Breton signalled the pouring of the sixth vial; or what the slaying of the witnesses referred to.[33]

These letters also sparked more concrete action. A number of Scots sent over a proposal designed to hasten the coming kingdom by holding a series of public prayer meetings. The scheme had been tried for several years in Scotland and seemed to be working, so Edwards spearheaded a similar effort in New England. He hoped the "disposition to such prayer" created by the meetings would "gradually spread more and more, and increase to greater degrees; with which at length will gradually be introduced a revival of religion." Others

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[31] Edwards, Works, I, 19.

[32] Stein, "Notes," II, 324, 327, 321-22.

[33] The Works of President Edwards, Sereno Dwight, ed. (10 vols.; New York, 1830), I, 230, 214 ff. (hereafter cited as Dwight, ed., Works).

would then be awakened, and "in this manner, religion shall be propagated, until the awakening reaches those that are in the highest stations, and until whole nations be awakened. ..."[34] The concert of prayer never succeeded in kindling revivals as large as the earlier ones, but the prayer meetings continued to be held in some New England congregations for more than fifty years.[35]

The magnificent scope of the great drama fascinated Edwards, and he preached a series of thirty sermons for half a year in 1739 tracing the divine plan all the way from Adam's creation and fall down to the present times, and the coming millennium and final judgment.[36] The idea of such a grand history intrigued him, and near the end of his life, he accepted the presidency of the College of New Jersey only on the condition that he be granted enough free time to write

> a great work, which I call a History of the Work of Redemption, a body of divinity in an entire new method, being thrown into a form of a history; considering the affair of Christian Theology, as the whole of it, in each part, stands in reference to the great work of redemption by Jesus Christ; which I suppose to be, of all others, the grand design of God...particularly considering all parts of the grand scheme, in their historical order.... This history will be carried on with regard to all three worlds, heaven, earth, and hell; considering the connected, successive events and

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[34] A Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God's People in Extraordinary Prayer in Edwards, Works, III, 432-33.

[35] Dwight, ed., Works, I, 246.

[36] History of the Work of Redemption in Edwards, Works, I.

> alterations in each, so far as the scriptures give any light....[37]

The college was ready to grant the request, but Providence proved unwilling. Edwards died in 1758 from an inoculation against the smallpox, before he could finish his cherished project. Like Cotton Mather, his interest in the prophecies late in life remained as strong as it had been early in his career.

Preliminary evidence, then, indicates that at least some New Englanders gave much more than passing attention to the prophecies. And in fact, Mather and Edwards were hardly alone in their interest. One purpose of this dissertation is to document more fully the prophetic speculation of less prominent men. But the accomplishment of that task inevitably leads to the second and more interesting question: Granting New Englanders' concern for the subject, did it affect in any significant way the rest of their lives?

The answer to that requires a good deal of mental exercise, and understandably so. For many historians, the prophetic tracts which eighteenth century scholars turned out seem rather strange: if not in their metaphors, at least in their logic. The conflagration and last judgment may be familiar as theological concepts, or antichrist and the beast as literary symbols; but we hardly take them as accurate

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[37] Dwight, ed., Works, I, 560-70. Stein argues that this refers not simply to a republication of the 1739 sermons but an entirely new version utilizing researches in the "Notes on the Apocalypse." Stein, "Notes," I, 83-84.

representations of events and forces in the future history of mankind. Thus it is not easy to imagine what logical connections might have been made, or conclusions drawn, by those who took the prophecies seriously.

A small example of the vagaries of eschatological speculation can be found in an after-dinner conversation between two lay students of the Revelation, Samuel Sewall and Paul Dudley. That evening they were engaged in "Discourse about the Body," and what its state would be at the final judgment. Dudley thought that when the dead were resurrected, "the Belly should not be raised, because he knew of no use of it." Sewall countered with the argument that since Christ was perfect, and He had a belly, so too would the saints. Dudley was not satisfied; it seemed to him several parts of the body would be of little use:

> Dudley: What use of Tasting, Smelling?
> Sewall: Tis possible the bodies of the Saints may have a Fragrancy attending them.
> Dudley: Voice is Laborious.
> Sewall: As much Labour as you please, the more the better, so it be without Toil, as in Heaven it will be. I dare not part with my Belly. Christ has redeemed it, and there is danger of your breaking in further upon me, and cutting off my Hand or foot.

Apparently Sewall himself was not completely satisfied by his answers, and only the next day did he think of a clinching argument. "This morning [it] comes to my mind, I can't believe the blessed Womb that bore our Saviour, will always be buried."[38] What historian could anticipate the logic in that

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[38] Diary of Samuel Sewall, Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society (3 vols.; 5th Ser., V-VII; Boston, 1878-82), II, 430 (hereafter cited as Sewall, Diary).

reasoning!

Yet even this fails to convey the strangeness found in the often meticulous texture of prophetic exposition. Here again, Sewall serves as a good example. He was a merchant, and not a publisher-preacher like Mather; yet he did prepare several works for the press. In his opinion, the most important one was the Phenomena quaedam Apocalyptica, or Some few Lines towards a description of the New HEAVEN As It makes to those who stand upon the NEW EARTH. As a sample of the work, historians have most often quoted Sewall's description of Plum Island:

> As long as Plum Island shall faithfully keep the commanded Post; not withstanding all the hectoring Words, and hard Blows of the proud and boisterous Ocean; As long as any Salmon, or Sturgeon shall swim in the streams of Merrimack; or any Perch or Pickeril, in Crane Pond; As long as the Sea-Fowl shall know the Time of their coming, and not neglect seasonably to visit the Places of their Acquaintance; As long as any Cattel shall be fed with the Grass growing in the Medows, which do humbly down themselves before Turkie-Hill; As long as any Sheep shall walk upon Old Town Hills, and shall from thence pleasantly look down upon the River and the fruitful Marishes lying beneath.... So long shall Christians be born there; and being first made meet shall from thence be Translated, to be made partakers of the Inheritance of the Saints in Light.[39]

Unquestionably, historians have been right in giving the passage prominence. This is Sewall's prose style at its finest. Furthermore, its lyricism is directed towards something any modern reader can appreciate: the concrete beauty of Turkie-Hill, Sheep and Cattel.

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[39]Samuel Sewall, Phenomena (2nd ed.; Boston, 1727), p. 64.

But unfortunately, the Plum Island passage is hardly characteristic of the subject matter found in the Phenomena. A more representative choice would be the following:

> I was now about to have passed on to the Sixth Vial; but am interrupted by some of my Friends, who suppose that not one of the Vials is yet poured out. To which Objection, I have nothing more satisfactory to myself, to say, than what I writ in answer to Mr. Benjamin Eliot, April 7, 1685. Some object, that Revel. 11.19. & Rev. 15.5 intend the same Thing: and the Witnesses are not yet risen, and therefore there is no Vial as yet poured out. Vide Med. lib 3. cap. 6. P. 735. Answ. See Med. Synchron. 5. Sect. 3 P. 534. The word Temple, in both places signifies the Reformed Church fashioned according to the Commandment of Christ, and his Apostles; and separated from that sorry earthly heaven conformable to the inventive fancys of men. But these two Scriptures have respect to very different Times, and Conditions of this Church. The Opening mentioned Rev. 15.5 precedes that mentioned Rev. 11. 19. some hundreds of Years. The Temple Rev 15.5 is the Temple of the Tabernacle of the Testimony. Tabernacle] intimating its ambulatory, and moveable condition, taken down in one place, and set up in another, according to the holy, wise, and soveraign Pleasure and Providence of God: And this may be spoken of in contradistinction to the Temple Rev. 11.19, wherein God will settle his Abode, Psal. 46:4.[40]

For us, the passion behind Plum Island is easily evident; but there is passion behind these lines too. Something moved Samuel Sewall to spend long hours pouring over the Bible, weighing the opinions of other authorities, writing his friends for their opinions. Because of the strangeness, we must infer the passion; and having done that, somehow attempt to fit this strange part of his world into the more familiar aspects of eighteenth century life. What connections are there between the passion for the seven vials and the concrete world of Plum Island?

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[40] Ibid., pp. 18-19.

III

One answer historians have given is that there are no important connections. Ola Winslow, in her typically excellent biography of Sewall, devoted a scant four page chapter to the Phenomena, considering it as part of "an intellectual life apart from [his] daily busyness." The text of it, she said, "is as coldly removed from the life of his time (or anyone's time) as the title might suggest."[41] Basically, she saw Sewall's concern with the Revelation as only a hobby on the side. Another biographer seemed almost embarrassed by the Phenomena, and assured his readers, despite what they might think about Sewall's fantastic ideas, that "all transcendental beliefs are in some sense 'fantastic'; that some of the most fantastic have figured in man's greatest accomplishments; and that in the absence of a better means of evaluation, one must look to results."[42]

In some cases, these answers may be no answer at all, merely a dodge of the problem. It is always easier to attribute actions to more familiar and understandable motives. Yet a more important and sophisticated point is at stake. Is it not possible to face the problem squarely, admit that prophetic speculation was a significant part of many people's lives, and still claim it affected their behavior in no

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[41] Ola Winslow, Samuel Sewall of Boston (New York, 1964), p. 153.

[42] T. B. Strandness, Samuel Sewall: A Puritan Portrait (East Lansing, Mich., 1967), p. 107.

important way? The Revelation packs a good deal of imagery into a small number of pages, and the sketch provided earlier hardly does justice to the plethora of beasts, candlesticks and thrones. In addition, other books of the Bible like Daniel, Joel and Isaiah provide additional obscure prophetic texts. With so many vague symbols around, why not suppose that expositors picked the ones which suited their purposes, or interpreted the various visions according to the exigencies of current events? Theologians have been able to justify a wide variety of doctrines by citing scripture, and surely if any book bids fair to be used in an arbitrary way, it is John's Revelation.

If this is the case, then historians ought to use millennial tracts in the same way that psychiatrists use Rorschach blots. The blots may tell a psychiatrist much about his patient, but only if they are so amorphous that any meaning must be read into them. Thus when the analyst prepares his diagnosis, he will not list certain blots as causes of the patient's malady. In the same way (so the argument might go), millennial tracts could prove quite useful as an indication of a man's social stance; but it would be a mistake to see them as a determinant of that stance.

One study which implicitly adopted this attitude was Kenneth Silverman's biography of Timothy Dwight, another minister who delved deeply into the prophecies. Silverman perceptively noted that there was a strange combination of gloom and hope in Dwight's writings, calling it "his doomsday

rhetoric of broken cisterns" and his "birthday rhetoric of rising empires." He realized that the rhetoric was prophetic in tone, but argued that basically, it was shaped by the "political and social realities" of the time. "To fully understand [Dwight's] writings, one must translate the broken cisterns into Jefferson or Shays, the rising empires into Washington or Eli Whitney." Thus these contradictory stances "cannot be explained merely by his having entertained varying theories of history. They resulted from real upheavals in his time."[43] During the patriotic days of the Revolution, Dwight was optimistic about the future; but then Jefferson and infidelity threatened, and he became gloomy. With the Second Great Awakening, things began to look up and so too did Dwight's interpretations of the prophecies. With "infidelism all but vanquished, he postponed the millennium to sometime around 2000." But not for long. "As the religious revivals changed Dwight the Calvinist into Dwight the enlightened Protestant, the War of 1812 changed him back. It renewed his dormant chiliasm. He gave scriptural prophecies a fatalistic, contemporary reading...."[44] But then, the new health of religion and the settlement of the disestablishment controversy brought out "the long inactive optimistic half" of Dwight, and for the rest of his life, he remained faithful to this vision.[45] Thus prophecies are pulled out and polished

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[43]Kenneth Silverman, Timothy Dwight (New York, 1969), pp. 7-8.

[44]Ibid., pp. 113, 137. [45]Ibid., p. 151.

up according to their fitness for the varying circumstances.

Certainly this hypothesis must be taken seriously. Even contemporaries were aware of the ambiguities of the prophecies. Stanley Griswold, a Connecticut minister who differed with Dwight in matters of politics, also objected to the way he and others used prophecy. "It has been greatly disgraced by men's undertaking to construe it beforehand," he said. "If, for instance, all that has been said about the Revelation of John, is to be credited, a more wild, incoherent book never was written." Some people assumed they could discover God's meanings before the event, but actually they were only spouting their own "jargon and nonsense."[46] Obviously, we must be ready to admit the possibility that this strange part of New England lives did not significantly affect more mundane social relationships.

But there is a reply to this position. Surely the language and concepts men inherit limit and influence their response to the world as much as they reflect it. As Quentin Skinner has remarked in another context, "the models and preconceptions in terms of which we unavoidably organize and adjust our thoughts will themselves tend to act as determinants of what we think or perceive."[47] In that case, prophetic

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[46] Sermon No. 542, Griswold MSS Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University. For an earlier, English example of skepticism, see William Lamont, Godly Rule (London, 1965), p. 21.

[47] Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," History and Theory, VIII, No. 1 (1969), p. 6.

thought deserves to be treated as more than an obscure religious hobby or an interesting cultural mirror. And in fact, a number of historians have claimed that understanding millennial thought is a crucial part of understanding both the intellectual and social history of eighteenth century New England.

One of the distinctions these historians have stressed is that of pre- and post-millennialism. Pre-millennialists believed that Christ's coming would take place before—and in fact would inaugurate—the thousand years of peace and prosperity on earth. Post-millennialists believed that even though the spirit of Christ would be abundant during the millennium, his physical second coming would not occur until afterwards, at the general judgment. In a helpful study of Jonathan Edwards' eschatology, C. C. Goen concluded that Edwards was the first American to adhere to the post-millennial point of view, which he discovered in the works of English commentators Daniel Whitby and Moses Lowman.[48] Although this "new departure" might not have seemed significant at first, Goen pointed out a number of implications he felt were important. If the millennium began without Christ, then there was no need to wait for his coming to bring in the kingdom. Action was possible immediately. Furthermore, Edwards' reading of the Revelation construed the terrible prophecy about the

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[48] C. C. Goen, "Jonathan Edwards: A New Departure in Eschatology," Church History, XXVIII, No. 1 (1959), pp. 25-40.

slaying of the witnesses as having already taken place, whereas many commentators had previously thought it still in the future, indicating a time of trouble ahead for the church. If Edwards' reading was right, then the faithful had less reason to fear the coming of the kingdom, and would work harder to help usher it in. Thus the post-millennial reading of history became "an integral part of the optimistic activism which was destined to crown with success the 'errand into the wilderness.'"[49]

Goen and others saw this shift as important for several reasons. First, it indicated the connection which was to develop between religious millennialism and more progressive views of man. Though Goen admitted that direct evidence was lacking, he concluded, "it is difficult to believe that Edwards' historicizing of the millennium did not furnish a strong impetus to utopianism in America."[50] In an article published several years earlier, Stow Persons had attempted to point out more specifically the connections between the religious and secular idea of progress. He argued that the two concepts could not be linked merely because of a similarity in form. Rather, he said, the American enlightenment initially rejected the Calvinist view of history in favor of a cyclical approach. But since "the implicit conservatism" of this model proved a himdrance during and after the Revolu-

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[49] Ibid., p. 39.

[50] Ibid., p. 38.

tion, a new synthesis emerged. In it, "the idea of progress drew from millennialism its sense of the irreversible secular trend of the historical process, and from the moralism of the cyclical theory the assumption that the role of the individual in history was purposive and creative."[51] Another historian, Ernest Tuveson, also argued that "the idea that progress is the 'law' of history, that it is ordained, was religious before it was secular." The basic attributes of an "idea of progress" could be found "in the [post-]millennialist commentaries a century before Concorcet and Saint-Simon."[52]

The millennial quest supposedly inspired changes in religious as well as secular thought. Although Edwards did not know it, his millennialism was "of a piece" with the liberal theology which matured in the nineteenth century. It gave "encouragement" to the idea that human effort could affect history, and hence it was "a natural ally to the new doctrine of human ability which had already begun to make inroads on the older Calvinism."[53] In contrast to the optimistic, active post-millennialists, pre-millennialists were much

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[51]Stow Persons, "The Cyclical Theory of History in Eighteenth Century America," American Quarterly, VI, No. 2 (1954), p. 163. Goen's article showed that Persons was wrong in seeing Edwards and his followers as imminent pre-millennialists (Persons, p. 149).

[52]Ernest Tuveson, Redeemer Nation (Chicago, 1968), p. 39. Tuveson's terminology is different, but the distinction the same. He called pre-millennialists "millenarians" and post-millennialists "millennialists." Tuveson traced the European religious roots of the idea of progress in Millennium and Utopia (Berkeley, 1949).

[53]Goen, "New Departure," pp. 38-39.

more gloomy. Said Tuveson, "This school believes that 'It is not the intention of God to convert the world before that [second] advent.... No radical spiritual change in the condition of the world will take place, on the contrary, it will grow worse and worse, under the present dispensation.'"[54] There is nothing left for the faithful to do but "separate from an incurably evil world."[55]

These studies raised some crucial issues, but they did not provide a detailed examination of eighteenth century millennial thought. Tuveson's work treated several centuries, and limitations of space prevented Goen and Persons from doing more than hint at significant trends. Alan Heimert's Religion and the American Mind did more than hint. Over five hundred tightly packed pages trace the effects of religious divisions in America from the Great Awakening to the American Revolution, and more briefly on down to the election of Jefferson. Arrayed on opposite sides of the fence are two groups, the Liberals and the Calvinists. Edwards was the acknowledged leader of the latter, and his millennial views provided Heimert with a key for understanding social developments in America after 1740. "The heart and soul of Calvinism," he concluded, "was not doctrine, but an implicit faith that God intended to establish this earthly Kingdom—and to

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[54]Tuveson, Redeemer Nation, p. 34. Tuveson here quoted and accepted a definition in the Princeton Review, LV (1879), p. 415.

[55]Tuveson, Redeemer Nation, p. 35.

do so within the eighteenth century."[56]

Heimert agreed with Goen that indeed Edwards' millennialism was a significant departure. Declensions and jeremiads characterized early eighteenth century New England, and in a basically pessimistic stance, the Mathers used their chiliasm as the ultimate rhetorical device for bringing worldly colonists to their religious senses.[57] In contrast, "perhaps Edwards' most impressive achievement was to purge Calvinist millenarianism of all those seventeenth-century elements which were symptoms of cosmic despair."[58] One reason for this optimism was, as Goen had pointed out, a reinterpretation of the passages concerning the slain witnesses. But Heimert believed the experience of the Awakening confirmed and emphasized the post-millennial belief that the kingdom need not be inaugurated by the supernatural appearance of Christ; and that this had larger implications in terms of a post-millennial view of nature and supernature.

According to Heimert, pre-millennialists saw the end of time in essentially disjunctive terms. "Cataclysm, providential judgments, a personal second coming—all...represented dramatic interference in the course of history, abrupt reversals of its flow." Edwards' "high cosmic optimism" was

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[56]Alan Heimert, Religion and the American Mind (Cambridge, Mass., 1966), p. 66.

[57]Ibid., pp. 59-60. Perry Miller also takes this viewpoint in The New England Mind: From Colony to Province (Boston, 1961), pp. 187-88.

[58]Heimert, Religion and the American Mind, p. 64.

possible because the millennium did not need a great conflagration and miracles to bring it about. It could be accomplished by natural causes, and especially by "the use of human instrumentalities."[59] Tuveson concurred with this judgment. Post-millennialists believed that "God does not work through wonders and marvels, but by the established laws of nature, physical and human.... He works with and through men and their institutions to regenerate the kingdoms of this world," and thus there was no need for "the deus ex machina of the [pre-]millenarians."[60] Edwards all but removed Armageddon from the road to the millennium, whose fulfillment came in a series of gradual, natural steps which constituted a "nearly lineal progress."[61]

Thus Heimert, like other historians, has argued that far from being inconsequential, prophetic thought heavily influenced the outlook of an eighteenth century New Englander. If he were a pre-millennialist, he tended to be pessimistic, less active, socially conservative, and inclined towards supernatural and cataclysmic solutions. If he were a post-millennialist, he tended to be optimistic, active, socially progressive, and inclined towards natural, gradualistic solu-

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[59] Ibid., pp. 65, 59.

[60] Tuveson, Redeemer Nation, pp. 36, 38.

[61] Heimert, Religion and the American Mind, p. 66. Tuveson's progressivism, however, might put more emphasis on the cyclical element (Redeemer Nation, p. 33).

tions.[62] The scheme is logical and neat. It has the virtue of explaining prophetic thought without dismissing it: according it the importance Mather, Edwards and others wished to give it in their writings. One question remains, and that is, does the theory represent the true picture adequately? Astute readers who have noticed this is the introduction to the dissertation and not the conclusion may suppose I have some doubts. The more detailed reasons for them are revealed in subsequent chapters; at this point, only a more general suspicion is discussed.

That suspicion arises partly because the scheme outlined is logical and makes eminent sense. What seems at first a virtue may in the end prove a liability. This is not to say that historians have failed by drawing lines too clearly; by making shades of gray into black and white. Heimert's book, to use only one example, is replete with "to be sure" qualifiers.[63] Nor is it to say that the historian's explanation itself ought to be illogical and make eminent

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[62] See also David Smith, "Millenarian Scholarship in America," American Quarterly, XVII (Fall, 1965), pp. 535-49. Smith also supports these distinctions. Charles Sanford's Quest for Paradise (Urbana, Ill., 1961) is not discussed here because his categories are quite different and suffer from an attempt to work all of Western history into a framework of psychic desire for peace and rest in Nirvana. A valuable beginning bibliography is available in Leroy Froom, The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers (4 vols.; Washington, 1946-54), especially Vol. III. Froom, however, is a Seventh Day Adventist, and still very much interested in how many vials have been poured out.

[63] E.g., "To be sure, Winthrop did not phrase his argument against Calvinism explicitly in terms of undermining the cosmic support of evangelical optimism." Heimert, Religion and the American Mind, p. 72.

nonsense. But it is possible to write logically about a past figure's illogical conclusions and actions. And as we have seen, eighteenth century prophetic expositors often thought in strange ways. Perhaps if we knew for a fact that the world was going to become more and more sinful, and that Christ alone could save it through his second coming, our logic would lead us to gloomy inactivity. But did pre-millennialists in New England think that way too? There is good evidence they did not.

In effect, historians must take themselves seriously if they wish to argue that ideas as well as events influence a person's construction of his world: they must realize that they too are affected in the same way. When Quentin Skinner spoke, in the passage quoted earlier, of "pre-conceptions" which tended "to act as determinants of what we think or perceive," he was discussing the problems of historians, not millennialists. In the same article, he went on to make another point. He argued that scholars must beware of beginning the history of an idea by setting out "an ideal type of the given doctrine," because it all too easily becomes an entity in itself.

> The reification of doctrines in this way gives rise in turn to...a form of non-history which is almost entirely given over to pointing out earlier "anticipations" of later doctrines, and to crediting each writer in terms of this clairvoyance. So Marsilius is notable for his "remarkable anticipation" of Machiavelli; Machiavelli is notable because he "lays the foundation for Marx".... And so on.[64]

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[64] Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding," pp. 10-12.

In the case of millennial thought, the danger is that even if we avoid substituting our own logic for that of eighteenth century New Englanders, we use instead the logic of doctrines which Edwards and others are supposedly "anticipating." Then, their prophetic expositions are seen as important primarily because they are forerunners of the idea of progress, later radical religious utopianism, or Jeffersonian democracy. When Goen concluded, "Though Edwards knew it not, his historical millennialism was of a piece with the liberalizing thought which came to full flower in the following century," he said something which is more useful for understanding nineteenth century liberal thought than for discovering Edwards' own intentions. Goen properly made the distinction clear in his clause, "Though Edwards knew it not." But it is less clear in Heimert's discussion of Edwards' radicalism. At one point, Heimert first quoted Edwards' belief that God's great design had to do with rational creatures, and not animals or "lifeless things," and then claimed that this "principle" was "Edwards' special contribution to radicalism." The statement pretends to tell us something about Edwards, but does it? If he did use the principle for radical purposes, it does; but if his "contribution" was only to enunciate a principle others would later use (in this case, "his ideological heirs, the spokesmen of the early American democracy") it may indicate something about later radicals, but it leaves us uninformed about the reason Edwards made the state-

ment.[65]

If prophetic expositors in eighteenth century New England are to be understood properly, the connections between prophecy and the more concrete world must be their own, and not ones formulated by twentieth century logic or nineteenth century millennialists. Perhaps attempting to escape completely our own "models and preconceptions" is attempting to attain the impossible: a perspective of history above time, vouchsafed only to God—or through the ecstasy of revelation, to men like John. The historian's means are more modest; and any re-velation, unveiling of the past, will not come from being "in the spirit" on the sabbath. Yet the root of ecstasy is the Greek ekstasis, a stepping outside of oneself; which may well indicate a process worth pursuing. If, as Quentin Skinner noted, it is a commonplace "that our own society places unrecognized constraints upon our imaginations," then "It deserves...to become a commonplace that the historical study of the ideas of other societies should be undertaken as the indispensable and the irreplaceable means of placing limits on those constraints."[66]

Strange as prophetic expositors may seem to historians, both groups would agree that one can understand the

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[65]Heimert, Religion and the American Mind, p. 64. One might also be tempted to wonder who in eighteenth century America did think God's great design was directed primarily towards animals and lifeless things.

[66]Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding," p. 53. Peter Berger discussed the connotations of ecstasy in similar terms in Invitation to Sociology (New York, 1963), pp. 136-38.

present only by getting outside of it. Men like Mather and Edwards attempted to get outside of theirs by viewing the world from the perspective of God's history of redemption, and we turn now to look more closely at the consequences of their efforts.

Chapter 2

INTERPRETATION

I

The argument thus far has led to two not very helpful conclusions: first, Biblical prophecies seemed important to many eighteenth century New Englanders; and second, prophecies and expositions of them are strange to us. Obviously, we cannot draw any conclusions about the larger significance of prophetic thought until we make more intelligible the logic and terminology of eighteenth century interpreters. Accomplishing this requires a careful, sometimes rather arduous reading of the tracts and sermons dealing with the obscurities in the Revelation and other prophetic writings. Precisely because the subject matter is obscure and unfamiliar, the danger of misinterpreting what New Englanders wrote on the Revelation is as great as the danger of expositors misinterpreting the Revelation itself. A few examples sufficiently indicate the need for caution.

Obviously, the historian interested in millennial thought will want to know how far along ministers and theologians thought God had progressed in his grand scheme of salvation. Was the world nearing its end, with Christ's second coming imminent? Longer treatises often discussed in detail

prophetic numerical allusions, such as the 1260 days of the woman in the wilderness, or Daniel's seventy weeks. In that case, the writers' speculations were usually clear enough; but not all sermons were as specific. Sometimes New England preachers would merely assure their readers that they were living in the "last times" or the "latter days." Nicholas Noyes in 1698 referred to the times as "these last ages of the professing world"; and not many years later Benjamin Colman claimed that certainly "we live in the last Days."[1] The phrase sounds quite eschatological and expectant; yet Colman's italics indicated a Biblical origin which made its exact meaning ambiguous. The apostle Paul had originally used the term in referring to his own times, a fact that the context of the Biblical passage made clear. Hence later scholars generally concluded that "the whole days of the Gospel, since that glorious triumph of [Christ's resurrection]...be upon Scripture's reckoning the last times."[2] Another respected interpreter explained that "the latter times" could mean either the period just before Christ's coming, or else more generally the Christian era, since "the times wherein Saint Paul lived, and all the times of Christianity [were] the last times, and so stiled in Scripture." Even when the phrase meant the last times in a more limited sense, it could

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[1]Nicholas Noyes, New England's Duty to Become a Mountain of Holiness (Boston, 1698), p. 7. Benjamin Colman, Practical Discourses (2nd ed., Boston, 1747), p. 339.

[2]Robert Fleming, The Fulfilling of the Scriptures (Boston, 1743), p. 492.

still encompass a period of several hundred years.[3]

Colman's use of Biblical phraseology throughout his sermons was of course standard practice. For New Englanders, scriptural passages strengthened the sermon's argument; but for modern readers, they sometimes confuse the meaning, especially when prophecies are involved. The Revelation talks of darkened suns, falling stars, slain and resurrected witnesses. The meaning of these phrases is not immediately clear; yet considering the distinctions historians have drawn, it is crucial to know whether or not New Englanders believed the sun would really darken, or the witnesses literally rise from the dead. Expositors claimed they preferred to take the literal sense of scripture wherever possible, but often enough they found sufficient obstacles, and had to opt for a "figurative" or "mystical" sense. Joseph Sewall preached a sermon on the suddenness of Christ's coming, and noted Peter's statement "that in that Day, The Heavens shall pass away with a great Noise, and the Elements melt with a Fervent Heat." The passage augurs catastrophe on a wide scale; fortunately Sewall explained that scholars differed on its meaning. Some indeed felt it indicated "the substance of the world will wholly perish"; yet others thought it meant only the destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish nation. Sewall himself seems to have thought the prophecy might have a double application, the destruction of Jerusalem being a prefiguring of

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[3]Joseph Mede, Apostacy of the latter Times (London, 1641), p. 66.

the final "Day of Universal Doom; when in a literal sense, the Elements shall melt with fervent heat."[4] Other ministers were not always as helpful as Sewall, and sometimes—especially in sermons rather than formal expositions—they contented themselves with Biblical allusions unadorned by further explanation.

In any case, it seems evident that the first step in unravelling the meaning of millennial thought consists of trying to establish more clearly the particular order and nature of events which New Englanders (and the English expositors they consulted) thought the scriptures foretold for the latter part of the "last days."[5] The best way to interpret the strangeness of millennialists and their sermons is by watching them interpret the strangeness of the original Biblical prophecies.

The prophecies were, in fact, almost as strange to them as they are to us. Some divines thought them so mysterious that they were better left alone, one noting that Calvin "had Expounded all the Books of the Scripture except the Revelation, which his not doing of, was an excellent commentary."[6] In New England, Benjamin Colman did not disapprove

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[4]Joseph Sewall, The Certainty and Suddenness of Christ's Coming (Boston, 1716), p. 3.

[5]New England divines were quite conscious of the work their English predecessors and contemporaries had done in apocalyptic matters. It has proved impossible to cover all of the English millennial tracts New Englanders used, but I do include here the sources they cited most often.

[6]Thomas Philpot, A Defence of the Illustrations, preface; bound with A New Systeme of the Apocalypse (London, 1688).

of all speculation, but he felt that God had purposely hidden the times of prophecies' accomplishments, in part "to teach us Modesty in our Enquiries after them."[7] Another New Englander, perhaps reacting to one of Cotton Mather's hopeful sermons, made the point even more strongly by listing a number of predictions by European fanatics which had since proved wrong, but in their time had captured the fancies of "whole Hords of the Vulgar." As further ridicule, he included the case of a canny Scotsman named Nepeir who had first predicted only ninety-two years remained before the end of the earth, and then later complained to the king when His Majesty refused to grant him lands for a term of 500 years. "God a my soul!" the king was quoted as saying, "that is Four Hundred Years more than the World shall last, and would you hold my Lands in the world to come?" The writer to the Courant concluded that it sufficed for Christians to know only that Christ would appear again and that men ought to be solicitous less about establishing the final hour and more about leading holy lives.[8]

It was natural enough that those who wished to leave prophecies alone felt they were obscure; but even those who wrote expositions admitted the fact. Countless introductions stressed the difficulties of making sense of the Revelation, and only with diffidence hazarded guesses about events yet to

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[7]Colman, Practical Discourses, p. 341.

[8]Anonymous letter, New England Courant, September 18, 1721.

be fulfilled. Some of this, of course, was rhetoric of the humble pie variety, trotted out for the introduction and forgotten once the writer had plunged into the heady conjectures of the text. Henry More, an English interpreter, made only a perfunctory nod in the direction of prophetic obscurity, and even before the preface was out, claimed that although he found nearly eighty flaws in Grotius' commentary, he doubted "any one should be able to find one in my whole Exposition"![9] But such confidence was not usual, and for a good reason: everybody acknowledged that prophecies by their very nature were meant to be obscure. Any modern reader who is used to thinking of prediction as being valid only if it is made specifically, and before the event, can certainly see how prophetic forecasts were easily malleable in imaginative hands. But were all these eminent divines so obtuse that they failed to notice how convenient it was to have a vague prophecy ready to fit the circumstances?

In fact, they were not. They believed that in men's hands at least, prophecy was not to be confused with prediction. The essence of any prophecy—in Greek as well as Christian traditions—was that its true meaning would be hidden from men until after its accomplishment. Isaac Newton, the man who excelled all others in predicting the motions of the solar system, made the distinction quite clear in his own study of the prophecies:

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[9]Henry More, Apocalypsis Apocalypseos (London, 1680), xv.

> The folly of Interpreters has been, to foretel times and things by [prophecies], as if God designed to make them Prophets.... The design of God was much otherwise ...he gave [them] not to gratify men's curiosities, by enabling them to foreknow things, but that after they were fulfilled they might be interpreted by the event.[10]

The observation was a commonplace among prophetic expositors; one New Englanders knew was "agreed upon by all sober Divines and Christians."[11]

Why then did so many sober ministers persist in trying to unravel what they agreed were unravelable mysteries? In the first place, the Revelation and other prophecies were accepted as part of Holy Scripture, and scripture was designed by God to be of use to His people. Men ought not to reject out of hand that which God had so graciously bestowed: and Jesus himself had closed the Revelation by saying, "Blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book." So it was entirely natural for Samuel Lee, like many others, to argue that God "thought meet to write these things, and who art thou, vile worm, to say to him what dost thou?"[12] In addition, many centuries had passed since John received the Apocalypse, and expositors were convinced that indeed many of the prophecies already had been fulfilled, thus being legiti-

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[10]Isaac Newton, Observations on the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of Saint John (London, 1733), p. 251.

[11]John Higginson, "Epistle Dedicatory," p. 6; in Noyes, New England's Duty.

[12]Samuel Lee, Dissertation concerning the Place and State of the dispersed Tribes of Israel (London, 1677), p. 126.

mately "interpreted by the event." As Newton and others pointed out, Daniel had prophesied a time at the end of the world when "many shall run to and from and knowledge shall be encreased." Since this and the rest of the prophecy referred to the "last age" of the world, "it makes for the credit of the Prophecy, that it is not yet understood. But if the last age...be now approaching, as by the great successes of late Interpreters it seems to be, we have more encouragement than ever to look into these things."[13]

Of course, these justifications did not solve the problem; they only changed the question. If the only prophecies that could surely be known were ones that had been fulfilled, how did one decide which ones these were? Supposedly the events themselves would make that obvious, but as John Danforth noted, "The Diversity of Conjecture about the meaning of some of the abstruse Hieroglyphicks of Heaven...in the Writings of our Worthies, shews 'em still to be men, and that as yet they know but in part."[14] Anyone who browsed through Matthew Poole's Synopsis of the various interpretations knew Danforth was right. What may have been an offhand comment actually struck right at the central issue: diversity seemed to prove that interpreters were, after all, still only men, and what they had hoped could pass as infallible truth obviously was in part based on private wishes or imperfect

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[13]Newton, Observations, pp. 250-51.

[14]John Danforth, Judgment begun at the House of God (Boston, 1716), p. 94.

knowledge.

Again, the problem was not one expositors overlooked. In apostolic times, Peter had warned his fellow Christians that "no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation"; and the Revelation contained a final admonition that "If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book." But recognizing the problem was easier than actually doing something about it; and that was why Joseph Mede's little book Clavis Apocalyptica (issued in 1627 and translated into English by order of Commons in 1642) made more than the usual stir. The Key to the Revelation, along with subsequent studies, established Mede as a major prophetic interpreter; and Increase Mather echoed the sentiments of many when he said that out of all the interpreters he had consulted, Mede "excells all."[15]

There were several reasons for this attention and respect. Unlike most other expositors, Mede devoted the majority of his life to the study of the prophecies. Born in 1586, he learned Hebrew while still quite young, and in 1602 entered Christ's College, Cambridge. In temperament he was extremely shy and abhorred controversy (he avoided taking sides in the Arminian disputes); and consequently, he never made a reputation as a polemicist or defender of the faith. Problems with stuttering, which "rendered his expression

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[15]Increase Mather, Dissertation Wherein the Strange Doctrine... (Boston, 1708), p. 109.

painful to himself, and less pleasing to others," closed the possibilities of a brilliant preaching career, and Mede settled down to a life of study as a fellow at Christ's college. His own diffidence caused him to publish only two more works during his career, but after his death in 1638 (very likely hastened by remedies which passed for medicine in those days) his letters and unpublished manuscripts were gathered together and published in the collected Works of the Pious and Profoundly Learned Joseph Mede, the majority of which was devoted to prophetic speculation.[16]

Mede won attention partly because this kind of speculation was novel at the time. Augustine had begun a long tradition which interpreted the thousand years of Satan's binding as occurring after Christ's resurrection, and hence, already past. Mede's new conclusions were soon abroad "by a rumour spread of his opinion, concerning the glorious Kingdome of Christ here on earth, which many hundred yeares agoe was cryed down as the Errour of the Millennaries."[17] Although a few other theologians had made conjectures about a millennium still to come, Mede was the first to revive the belief that the martyrs' thousand year reign would take place

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[16]John Worthington, ed., Works of the Pious and Profoundly Learned Joseph Mede (London, 1672). I have drawn most biographical information from the Life included in this edition. It seems to confirm the title of the collection. See also Richard G. Clouse, "The Rebirth of Millennarianism," in Peter Toon, ed., Puritans, the Millennium and the Future of Israel: Puritan Eschatology 1600-60 (Cambridge, England, 1970), pp. 42-65.

[17]William Twisse, in the Preface to Mede, Apostacy of the Latter Times.

on earth before its final destruction.[18] The Clavis first voiced these speculations in 1627, but even fifteen years later when Commons received a report on the advisability of having it translated, a London minister concluded,

> though Master Medes opinion concerning the thousand years of the seventh Trumpet be singular from that which hath beene most generally received by Expositors of best esteem, and I conceive hath no just ground, yet he therein delivers his judgement with such modestie and moderation that I think the Printing of it will not be perillous.[19]

Mede's writings were soon winning converts with increasing speed, but not primarily because his novel ideas of the millennium proved irresistible. As we shall see, a good deal of variety still existed on that score. What gained Mede a respect which went beyond the initial interest in his new ideas was the nature of the "Key" he provided for interpreting the prophecies. Too many scholars failed to consider the internal evidence and order of the Revelation, he argued; they assumed that the events followed one another in the order in which they appeared in John's book. But surely that was a naïve assumption: even the slightest look at the narratives of contemporary chroniclers and historians showed that

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[18] John Piscator had already suggested a future reign in heaven; and John Henry Alsted had moved that to earth, but put it after the last judgment. See Twisse's Preface to Mede, Apostacy.

[19] Joseph Mede, The Key of the Revelation (London, 1643). The pagination of this report is unclear, since in the Yale University library copy, the unnumbered page has been torn from its original place. The Key itself is divided into two Parts, each separately paginated, although bound as one volume.

one hardly ever used such a rule when writing history. Narratives usually had a section dealing with the doings of kings and politics, followed by another covering religious history for the period, and so forth. Since the events in the Revelation were more obscure, the first task was to find where such divisions occurred, in order to "synchronize" the various prophecies which referred to the same time periods.[20]

Accordingly, Mede presented a series of seven key synchronisms which helped to make sense out of the Revelation. The woman remaining in the wilderness for 1260 days, for instance, referred to the same time period as the 1260 days when the witnesses were prophesying in sackcloth, and the forty-two months when the beast was said to rule. When these synchronisms had been identifed, it became clearer that the bulk of the Revelation was "distributed into two principall prophecies, either of which proceedeth from the same time, and endeth in the same period."[21] The first was the book John saw which was bound with seven seals, containing the visions of the seals and the trumpets. These dealt primarily with political and secular events from the days of John to the last judgment. The remaining prophecies were taken from

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[20]Mede may well have coined the term. His editor noted that "The glory of the First discovering these Synchronisms is peculiarly due to Mr. Mede"; and the Oxford English Dictionary lists his work as the earliest incidence of "synchonize" (although other writers had used various forms of the root combination—always within a prophetic context—as early as 1588).

[21]Mede, Key, Pt. I, pp. 2, 13.

the "little book" mentioned in Revelation 10, and covered the same time; only they referred more particularly to the story of the church and its struggle with the beasts, consummated by the pouring of the seven vials.[22]

To modern eyes, the results of Mede's system seem prosaic enough; but to expositors who delved through the many pages of the Pious and Profoundly Learned Works, it seemed as if Mede had gone a long way towards establishing a firm ground for prophetic explanation. Here was a system which could answer the accusation that prophecies were continually subject to the private whims of interpreters. The synchronisms kept such whims in check; but "without such foundation," Mede concluded, "thou shalt scarce draw anything out of the Revelation...which resteth upon divine authority, but [rather] upon begged principles, and meere humane conjectures."[23]

Readers of the Key found the tools used to arrive at these synchronisms equally impressive. Since Mede had an acquaintance with the Greek, Syriac and Chaldean languages, he was able to compare original texts, and "he found by good experience that some Scriptures do excellently illustrate others where the like Expressions are to be found." This linguistic approach led him to assert what modern Biblical scholars now accept: that "the Style of the New Testament

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[22] Ibid., p. 13.

[23] Ibid., p. 27.

doth frequently imitate the Construction and Propriety of the Hebrew in the Old." Furthermore, Mede logically assumed that since the prophetic symbols were originally taken from a culture quite different from his own, the best interpretations of such phrases would come from men of the same culture. Thus he studied Chaldean paraphrases of scripture (in the Targum) and came to some revealing conclusions. When the Biblical prophets, for instance, announced that God's judgments were "to come upon all the Cedars and Oaks, Esay 3)... the Targum instead of mentioning these tall and goodly Trees has...Princes of the People and Rulers of Provinces."[24] To further buttress his arguments, Mede expanded the scope of the Clavis when he reissued it in 1632, including a wealth of historical evidence based on his familiarity with Roman history and the customs of the "Ethnick Antiquities."[25]

In short, Mede's rigorous and scholarly method impressed scholars, and they too concluded that a system of interpretive rules was the thing needed to systematize prophetic study. Without such guidelines, argued one English minister, everyone would be forced to "look upon the Prophecies as things of no Authority, which may be applied to any event according to the cunning and fancy of an Interpreter."[26] A French protestant, whose commentary was read by English and

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[24]John Worthington, General Preface; in Mede, Works.

[25]Clouse, "The Rebirth of Millennarianism," p. 60.

[26]Peter Allix, Two Treatises (London, 1707), viii.

New Englanders alike, amplified the argument by comparing prophetic methods with those used in other scientific endeavors:

> When we are to learn crabbed and abstruse Sciences, we begin with Common Notions, and with principles which are the most evident: and so we proceed by degrees till we have advanced into, and have conquered that which is more sublime and difficult.... And if we take the same course in our search into the Apocalyptic Mysteries, there will remain little but what we may master and unravel.[27]

As a result of this attitude, others were soon following Mede's example.

Some scholars took time to formulate a specific number of axioms which were set out in advance, so that the exposition could proceed in an orderly fashion. William Whiston, professor of Mathematics at Cambridge and popularizer of Newton's scientific discoveries, provided his readers with a series of "preparatory Observations as will be of great use all along": a preface that took fully a third of the book. One of Whiston's primary concerns was to put the results of historical and scientific research to work in order to make chronological predictions in the prophecies more exactly translatable into specific terms. Hence his rules established such propositions as

> Jewish Prophecies use a year for a year.
> Christian Prophecies use a day for a year.
> The Stile of both follow the custom of the Age and Nation of each Prophet.
> Prophecies often use the past tense for the future.
> Prophecies sometimes Disorder'd in our present Copies;

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[27]Philpot, A New Systeme, preface.

> If the true Order were restor'd they would then be much easier.[28]

The end results of this precision were undoubtedly deceptive in their exactness, but at least they were formulated by a rigorous mind. Not all expositors had equal talent, and some similar attempts resulted in a series of rather absurd propositions. The general formulations by Peter Allix sounded suspiciously like the specific points he later planned to prove. ("A Prophecy which supposes the distinction of the People into two Kingdoms, cannot be supposed to be fulfilled, but at a time when they are actually distinguished into two Kingdoms."[29])

More often, interpreters did not bother to codify such premises, and merely produced them as the various occasions warranted. Thomas Goodwin agreed with other interpreters in asserting that prophecies often had two fulfillings, the first being a weaker forerunner of the later accomplishment. Increase Mather noted the commonplace that the literal meaning of a prophecy must always be taken "if it will stand with the Analogy of Faith," and quoted a "Law of opposites" which demanded that parallel incidents (ones which "opposed" each other, like the first and second resurrection in the Revelation) must be interpreted in similar ways, either literally or allegorically.[30]

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[28]William Whiston, Accomplishment of Scripture Prophecies (London, 1708), Table of Contents.

[29]Allix, Two Treatises, x-xi.

[30]Thomas Goodwin, Exposition of the Revelation, in

The upshot of all this theorizing was both reassuring and disquieting. Prophetic scholars had dealt with a most serious problem and emerged confident that their methods had provided an objectivity able to rise above private whims. They could now clothe their speculations with a vocabulary of abstruse concepts and seeming exactness which at times could match the jargon of a modern social scientist. ("The preconsideration of the ruine of the Roman Empire conducts to the expectation of the great devastations and confusions in the Papal. The fuller indagation of these periods belonging to another paper; I return to Israel...."[31]) Yet the solution was still a disquieting one, perhaps precisely because it worked so well in theory. General rules, even if they were derived correctly, had to be applied to specific cases. To prove their real worth, they would have to succeed at untangling the mystifying collection of prophetic allusions in a way which everyone could agree upon. Otherwise, the accusation of the sceptics could be applied with equal force to the rules and applications themselves.

This objection, in its more sophisticated form, was one which most expositors were less able to deal with, perhaps in part because most of them failed to perceive the force of it. Unfortunately, historians cannot afford to

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Works (Edinburgh, 1886), III, 155-56; Increase Mather, Dissertation Concerning the Future Conversion (London, 1709), p. 19.

[31]Lee, Dissertation Concerning the Place and State, p. 121.

overlook the problem, although for different reasons. For if all the divines failed in their efforts to establish a uniform interpretation of the Revelation, does this not imperil the attempts of historians to find any consistent eschatological social outlook among eighteenth century interpreters? If the canons of interpretation succeeded only in producing conflicting scenarios of the last days, then perhaps the historians who saw millennial tales as mere Rorschach blots have an excellent case after all.

II

As we have seen, England produced a host of expositors who proposed their own solutions of the prophetic puzzles. Thus New England divines had at their disposal—and used—many of these commentaries as guides in preparing their own opinions. What they found when they examined the interpretations available to them was not the unanimity everyone hoped a strict use of rules would produce. If, as many suspected, these were the days when knowledge was indeed "running to and fro" over the globe, it was, in its haste, being rather careless about how the searchers of scripture were enlightened.

Mede, whom everyone respected, had ventured one version of the drama. It opened with the first six seals, which were the judgments of Christ upon the pagan Roman empire. The first was obviously the blow struck against its power by Christ's resurrection itself, and from thence, the empire

fell slowly but surely as internal slaughters, wars, pestilence and famine were meted out periodically under the seals.[32] The last of these encompassed an even greater seven-fold plague, described by the seven trumpets. They consisted of a long series of invasions, from the early barbarians like the Huns and Vandals down to the Saracens, Arabians and Turks.[33] This dreary procession of secular history ended with the seventh trumpet's thousand year reign. Meanwhile, the open book prophecy explained what had been going on at the same time in the church. The dream about the heavenly woman giving birth to a son meant not Christ himself, but the "mysticall Christ, or Christ formed in his members."[34] The faithful, though threatened by the red dragon of pagan Rome, were delivered by Constantine, clearly the meaning of the child's being caught up to God's throne. Despite this good fortune, the woman was still driven into the wilderness, where she waited for 1260 days; and of course, the whore of Babylon who kept her there was none other than the Roman Catholic church.

Mede's synchronism had made it clear that these 1260 days were the same time in which the witnesses were prophesy-

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[32] Mede, Key, Pt. I, pp. 40-67.

[33] Of the seven trumpets, the last three were specifically called woe trumpets. This could be confusing at times, since, e.g., the Saracens and Arabians might be said to be either under the fifth trumpet or the first woe trumpet; and the Turks under either the sixth trumpet or the second woe trumpet.

[34] Mede, Key, Pt. II, p. 37.

ing in sackcloth, and this fitted admirably into his scheme. But what was meant by their slaying and resurrection at the end of that period? Mede thought these events were still to come, but he was convinced that such words as "slaughter" and "death" were to be interpreted "metaphorically or analogically."[35] The same held true for their resurrection, "because no resurrection properly so called can be before the coming of Christ under the seventh Trumpet." Since the witnesses' revival came under the sixth, Mede interpreted their death as a "dejection of them from the office and place which they a little while had gotten in the reformed Church." In some cases, persecution by Catholics would mean death for individuals, but as a whole the prophecy referred to the political misfortunes of the church. After the three and a half years when they lay symbolically dead in the street, "a great commotion of the Nations, and alteration of Politique affaires" would take place, "whereby indeed a way is opened for the Witnesses, and power given them of reviving, with so great increase of dignitie and authoritie."[36]

Mede still had to deal with one more set of plagues: the pouring of the seven vials. Where would they fit in? Obviously, the Revelation made it clear that they destroyed the Roman Catholic whore, but exactly what each stood for was less certain. Mede guessed that the first had been poured

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[35] Ibid., p. 14.

[36] Ibid., pp. 15, 24-25.

when Wyclif and Huss testified to Rome's sin, and the second, when Luther once again revived the true faith. Queen Elizabeth's statutes against Catholics in England seemed the likeliest candidate for the third; but "the rest," concluded Mede, "remain to be poured out." He conjectured that the fourth, poured on the sun, would perhaps refer to Rome's loss of influence over the German empire. After this had happened, the witnesses would be resurrected and the fifth vial emptied on Rome itself, the seat of the beast. The sixth vial would signal an end to the desolation by the Turks, whose stronghold was the Euphrates River. And since they were also responsible for the sixth trumpet, their downfall would mark the end of that period.[37]

At the same time, the Jews—so long scattered and dispersed throughout the world—would be converted and return to their original home. Just how this improbable event would be accomplished was the source of much speculation among divines. Mede's own theory was that their conversion would be, like the apostle Paul's, accomplished by a miracle. "That of the Jews may be like it; viz. That though many were present with S. Paul at that time, yet none saw the apparition of Christ, nor heard him speak, but Paul alone...."[38] And one way or another, the Jews would make their way home, perhaps aiding in the defeat of the Turkish foe at the same time.

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[37] Ibid., pp. 115-20.

[38] Mede, Works, pp. 766-67.

All that remained before the earthly triumph was the seventh vial, which Mede predicted would dramatically inaugurate the millennial reign. And this would be "not with a humane arme now any more, but with a heavenly and thunder striking revenge." At that point, Christ would appear "from heaven in flaming fire," and the ensuing conflagration would act to refine the world until it became a new heaven and earth.[39] Revelation 20:5 referred to a "first resurrection," which Mede believed was the beginning of the last judgment. His first inclination had been to interpret it as "a rising of the Church from a dead estate...yet afterward more seriously considering and weighing all things, I found no ground or footing for any sense but the Literal."[40] This suggested that the thousand year reign was to be enjoyed by immortal martyrs alone, raised early from the dead as a reward for their sufferings through persecution. But Mede felt the situation was more complicated: the Revelation spoke not only of the New Jerusalem but also of "Nations that are saved" which would "walk in the light of the New Jerusalem."[41] Thus he made a distinction between the risen martyrs who reigned in the new heavens and those "faithful servants of God who shall be found here alive at Christ's coming." The latter, though they would escape the fire, would still remain to live out

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[39]Mede, Key, Pt. II, p. 121; Mede, Works, pp. 613-18.

[40]Mede, Works, p. 770.

[41]Rev. 21:24.

their mortal lives on the new earth.[42] At the end of the thousand years, their progeny would face the forces of Gog and Magog, when Satan was let loose for the last time.

Where these evil forces would come from was a problem, and Mede hazarded a guess that America might do. It was a place remote from the central drama, and perhaps the conflagration would not have reached there, leaving the land as an unrefined blot in an otherwise blissful world. Mede's friend William Twisse liked the idea, and commented that "the grounds you go upon, for ought I see, are as good as the world can afford." Despite what optimists might think, the Indians appeared to be prime candidates for Satan's final army. And ironically, "Were it not for Christians that live amongst them, they could neither have notice of the glory of the new Jerusalem, nor ever in all likelihood attain either to the Art of Shipbuilding and Navigation, or Art military, to fit them for such an Expedition as you speak of." Mede was quite diffident about these conjectures, calling them mere "Fancies"; but Twisse thought they were "sage conceits."[43]

Mede urged caution on one other subject, and that was the presence of Christ during the thousand years. "No doubt" it would be "glorious and evident," he said; "yet I dare not so much as imagine (which some Ancients seem to have thought) that it should be a Visible Converse upon earth."[44] Christ's

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[42]Mede, Key, Preface; Mede, Works, p. 604.

[43]Mede, Works, p. 809; see also pp. 574-76.

[44]Ibid., p. 603.

proper place was on his kingly throne in heaven. What Mede meant by a visible appearance was the same thing he meant when discussing Christ's appearance to the Jews at their latter day conversion; his literal second coming would take place only when Gog and Magog were vanquished and the universal resurrection accomplished. Then the wicked as well as those other saints who had not been raised earlier would come forward to be judged, and the final scene would be played out as writers had traditionally imagined it.

The scheme was a grand one, backed by years of study; and no doubt it helped to shape the general contours of prophetic interpretation in the following years. Mede did consolidate and establish the growing trend towards putting the millennium back in the future. Only a few years after the English translation of the Key, John Lightfoot felt compelled to speak against "the millenary opinion which I cannot but judge erroneous," which he was afraid might "go on altogether uncontrolled."[45] But Lightfoot was fighting a losing battle. Expositors generally accepted the idea of a future reign, as well as Mede's central division of the Revelation into the simultaneous prophecies of the sealed and the little opened books.

But beyond these general areas, it was not easy to get agreement.[46] One of the most troublesome problems was trying

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[45] The Whole Works of the Rev. John Lightfoot (London, 1882), VI, 165.

[46] A few interpreters even challenged some of Mede's general points. William Whiston claimed it was wrong to

to fathom the specific meaning of the seven vials. Thomas Goodwin, writing not long after Mede's work first appeared, followed him more closely than anyone else, but still disagreed on details. (He thought, for instance, that the third vial probably referred to the defeat of the Spanish Armada.[47]) Others were more cautious in their hopes. Samuel Lee, a divine who spent part of his later life in New England, wrote in 1677 that not one of the vials had yet been poured. Three years later, Henry More agreed with him, arguing that Mede had mistakenly placed the plagues under the sixth trumpet, whereas they rightly belonged to the seventh.[48] Thomas Philpot also thought them still to come, but had a different list of calamities for each.[49] He argued strongly for his system partly in order to refute a treatise by another French minister who argued that all the vials had been poured out.[50]

To complicate matters, the slaying and rising of the

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limit the sealed book to secular affairs and the little open book to ecclesiastical ones (Essay on the Revelation [London, 1706], pp. 42-61). Peter Allix thought the great master did well enough with John's prophecies but had misread Old Testament predictions by depending too much on rabbinical traditions (Two Treatises, p. 66).

[47]Goodwin, Works, III, 101-08.

[48]Lee, Dissertation, p. 115; More, Apocalypsis, p. 249. Whiston also judged them yet unpoured.

[49]E.g., the first simply meant a loss of papal revenues, and Rome's fall had been placed earlier, under the third vial. Philpot, A New Systeme, pp. 253ff. and 98.

[50]Pierre Jurieu, The Accomplishment of the Scripture Prophecies (London, 1687).

witnesses had to be fitted in somewhere. Fortunately, virtually everyone agreed that the prophecy warranted a metaphorical reading. "Their resurrection is not from a natural death," reasoned Goodwin, and "therefore such not their killing."[51] But when would this take place? Some (Goodwin, More and Jurieu among them) agreed it would be in the midst of the pouring of the vials; others (like Philpot and Benjamin Keach) hoped for a resurrection before any of them had been loosed. But dividing interpreters into two camps on this point is deceptive. Both Goodwin and More held the former opinion, but since their schedules of the specific vials differed, Goodwin left the resurrection for the future while More set it at the remarkably early date of 1517 and the Reformation.[52]

Nor were opinions any more unanimous about the particulars of Christ's arrival. Whiston and others rejected Mede's belief that the extension of the seventh trumpet spanned the entire millennial reign, but this change was one of detail rather than substance. Whiston still had a dramatic conflagration, not to mention his own theory on its ignition by the fiery tale of a passing comet.[53] If anything,

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[51]Goodwin, Works, III, 164.

[52]Ibid., p. 154; More, Apocalypsis, pp. 111, 154 ff.; see also Benjamin Keach, Antichrist Stormed (London, 1689), pp. 156 ff.

[53]William Whiston, A New Theory of the Earth (London, 1696). Whiston's theory is discussed at greater length below, Chapter 3.

Whiston's version of the fire was even more spectacular than Mede's, since he did not exempt any part of the earth from the flames. But another interpreter, Drue Cressener, went in the other direction by supposing the fire itself would be restricted to the center of sin, Italy, and would continue throughout the thousand years as "the means of keeping [the inhabitants] in a more constant and strict observance of their Duty."[54] Other expositors challenged the notion that any fires at all would come before the millennium. "I know it is supposed by some that the Conflagration will be a Purgation and not a destruction of the creatures," said William Allen, alluding to Mede's theory. But he felt that the apostle Peter had "put the matter beyond all doubt or dispute, that the Conflagration" would occur not for purposes of purification at the first resurrection, but for destruction "at the last judgment of ungodly men." Henry More came to the same conclusion in his own studies.[55]

But while More and Allen agreed about the conflagration, they had radically different notions about the millennium itself. Allen saw it as virtually paradisical. The Bible had said that all creatures would find deliverance from the bondage of corruption, and if this did not come at the last judgment—and it seemed to Allen that it did not—"then

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[54]Drue Cressener, The Judgments of God upon the Roman Catholic Church (London, 1689), pp. 288-301; 301.

[55]William Allen, Of the State of the Church in Future Ages (London, 1684), p. 296. More, Apocalypsis, p. 259, and chronological chart, p. 256.

there is no time can be assigned for it so likely, as the time of Christ's universal kingdom on earth." Thus he predicted the soil would be more fertile in those days, and that perhaps even Isaiah's prophecy about the lion lying down with the lamb could be taken literally.[56] More's view was less exalted. Satan certainly would be bound for a thousand years, but the chains the angel would use were the powers of legislation, "which are bonds and iron chains to tye up the wicked from doing mischief." These laws would be so "rigid, severe and inviolable" that no one would dare to do anything "really Profane, Wicked, or Antichristian."[57]

Thus for More, Christ's coming to earth was only a spiritual one. True, the martyrs would be raised before the millennium, but they would live with Christ in heaven, not on earth.[58] Philpot echoed More's definition of the kingdom as a spiritual reign: "Whensoever the Jews come to be brought home, and all Nations converted; it will then appear so clearly, that Jesus Christ is come into the world, that if he should descend from heaven unto the Earth, we could not be more convinced." This position went a step beyond Mede's interpretation, since Christ's presence would be exemplified solely by this "deliverance of the Church from all her Enemies": even the martyrs' first resurrection was only a sym-

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[56]Allen, State of the Church, pp. 296, Preface, 299.

[57]More, Apocalypsis, pp. 205-07.

[58]Ibid., p. 207.

bolical one, "which consisteth in Sanctification."[59] At the other end of the spectrum of opinion was Jeremiah Burroughs, who thought there was "a Probability [that Christ] in his Person GOD and MAN...shall reigne upon the Earth, here in this World before that great and Solemne Day."[60] It was a glorious thought—and Goodwin too may have flirted with it—but most expositors steered clear of such extravagant hopes.[61]

Any New Englander, then, who was at all familiar with the range of opinions expressed by English and French divines, knew that the following conclusions had been reached: The witnesses had been slain and risen. The witnesses had not been slain and risen. The seven vials had all been poured. Some had been poured. None had been poured. The first resurrection was a literal one, of the martyrs themselves. It was a spiritual and political one. The day of judgment began before and ran through the thousand year reign. The day of judgment was after the thousand year reign. The conflagration would engulf the entire earth. It would engulf some of the earth. It would engulf only Italy. It came before the millennium. It came after the millennium. It lasted through the millennium. At Christ's second coming,

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[59]Philpot, A New Systeme, pp. 117, 112.

[60]Jeremiah Burroughs, A Glimpse of Sion's Glory (London [?], 1641), p. 27.

[61]Goodwin moves towards this opinion in A Glimpse of Sion's Glory in Works, XII, 71; though compare with his later sermon The World to Come in Works, XII, 96, where he draws back.

he would reign personally on earth. He would appear supernaturally, but not reign on earth. His coming was only spiritual, evidenced through the glorious state of the church. The millennium was a paradise where risen saints lived in a fertile, renewed land. It was a time not dramatically different from the present, except that evil men would be kept in line by strict laws.

What did New Englanders make of all this? Few of them had the time to devote their lives to the study of prophecies, as Mede had done; nor were there as many line-by-line paraphrases of the Revelation. Yet ministers often evidenced an intense interest in the subject, and their treatises and sermons give some idea of the varying viewpoints they held.

Historians are probably most familiar with the eschatological opinions of Increase and Cotton Mather, who have generally been cast in the roles of arch-typical pre-millennialists of the period before the Great Awakening.[62] Certainly their literal interpretation of the prophecies supports this notion. Both of them agreed that the only possible way to account for the resurrection of the martyrs was in an actual, bodily sense. Increase cited his already mentioned "law of opposites" to prove that since the second resurrection was literal, so also the first. Cotton set forth the other

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[62]Robert Middlekauff discusses their eschatology with a good deal more sophistication in The Mathers. Owing to the scope of this work, it will be impossible to discuss all of the changes in their views, which Middlekauff covers in some detail, especially in Chapters 10 and 17.

alternatives available, and eliminated each of them. He called "absurd" the opinion of some that a "work of Sanctification upon the Soul" was what was meant. More sensible was the conjecture that "'the Church then shall continue in a state of Glorious rest and peace,'" yet that too strained the sense of the prophecy by assuming the martyrs lived only through the spirit of their successors.[63] In assuming this double resurrection, the Mathers likewise accepted Mede's conclusion that Daniel's "Day of Judgment" was the same period as John's thousand years.[64] But while Mede thought that only the saints and martyrs would be resurrected, the Mathers optimistically assumed that all good men would be raised, leaving only the damned to be judged at the end of time.[65]

As for those who were still living on earth at Christ's coming, the situation was less clear. Certainly there would be a conflagration at His arrival, touched off by the flames in which Christ would be surrounded. In fact, Increase pointed out that actually, there would be "Two Conflagrations as well as Two Resurrections," the first inaugurating the millennium.[66] He remarked that Mede's ideas about America as

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[63] Cotton Mather, "Problema Theologicum," MS, American Antiquarian Society, pp. 59 ff., 62.

[64] Ibid., p. 56; Increase Mather, Dissertation Concerning the Future Conversion, pp. 23-24, 18.

[65] Increase Mather, Dissertation Concerning, pp. 16, 18; Cotton Mather, "Triparadisus," MS, American Antiquarian Society.

[66] Increase realized the theory implied that inhabitants of America would have no contact with the renovated

an unburned refuge for Gog and Magog were "ingenious, and may probably prove true." Where the fires did ravage, living saints would "be caught up into the Air" and thus escape the fate of ungodly men. Cotton was earlier in his career "less sure" whether saints would be saved in that way, but later accepted the idea more readily. Nor would he fully commit himself on the extent of the conflagration, arguing it was impossible to tell whether it would spread beyond Italy and the Roman territories.[67] As for America, he seemed more hopeful than his father. Possibly it might be used as a shelter for saints during the fire; and whatever happened, it would certainly "not be cast off" when Christ conquered the rest of the world.[68]

Both Cotton and Increase waxed ecstatic about the rewards in store for the saints after the conflagration. For them, the millennium was no mere flourishing of the gospel state. An age of miracles was dawning, said Cotton, and the end result would be a paradise much like the one William Allen had described.[69] Men would not be subject to sin or

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world; yet he seemed to contradict himself in the same treatise by arguing that "there will be a most glorious Conversion of all the Nations on the earth, which shall escape that Deluge of Fire." Dissertation Concerning, pp. 32-33, 30.

[67] Ibid., p. 15; Cotton Mather, "Problema," pp. 79-80; "Triparadisus."

[68] Cotton Mather, Theopolis Americana (Boston, 1719), pp. 47-50.

[69] Cotton Mather, Things for a Distressed People (Boston, 1696), p. 36.

temptations, and the church of course would be free of sectarian contention. Infirmities of the body would be a thing of the past, for no one would experience hunger, thirst or pain. Cotton noted with approval Drue Cressener's theory that the fiery vapors and ashes from the fires in Italy would cool to a temperate warmth and promote fertility in areas farther away, just as Vesuvius had in the past.[70] Unfortunately, Christ would not live on earth, but Increase did hope for an occasional visit from Him. Cotton surmised that the reign with the martyrs would be in "Regions of the Air," so that those living on earth could see Him anyway. When those living on the New Earth died, they would be "Translated" to the New Heavens—although this might not be until the end of the thousand years. For Increase, even this was superfluous, since the living saints would be made immortal "instantly" at the second coming.[71]

It was certainly a world to look forward to, and as we have seen, Cotton especially could not refrain from calculating the years that remained. Both he and Increase thought Whiston had been right in arguing that the vials all had to come under the seventh trumpet, and thus remained to be poured. But surely that would begin soon. Despite Cotton's disappointment in 1697, by 1710 father and son were affirming

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[70] Increase Mather, Blessed Hope (Boston, 1701), p. 11; Cotton Mather, "Problema," p. 79.

[71] Cotton Mather, "Problema," pp. 79-80; Increase Mather, Blessed Hope, p. 136.

that the sixth trumpet had passed, leaving only the seventh to sound.[72] What encouraged both of them were Whiston's computations, which gave "greater light" to chronological obscurities than any others. What was more, although Whiston often disagreed with Mede, in this particular case both of their calculations indicated that 1716 might inaugurate the precipitous fall of antichrist. Disappointment seemed only to whet Cotton's hopes. As he approached the end of his life, he became surer and surer that "all that has been foretold in the Scripture of Truth, as what must come to pass before the coming...is, as far as we understand, Fulfill'd: I say ALL FULFILL'D!"[73] He had to do some juggling to come to this conclusion, including abandoning his earlier belief that the Jews would be converted as a nation before Christ's arrival; but his hopes outran his caution, and he died convinced that millennial fires were imminent.

No doubt all this makes good evidence for a typically pre-millennial outlook in colonial America. Both Mathers stoutly defended Christ's supernatural appearance, a bodily first resurrection of the martyrs, and the conflagration. But at the same time, they indicated their defenses were so ardent because their opinions were hardly universal. In

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[72] Increase Mather, A Discourse concerning Faith and Fervency in Prayer (Boston, 1710), p. 97; Cotton Mather, Theopolis, p. 4.

[73] Increase Mather, Dissertation Wherein the Strange..., p. 93; Cotton Mather, "Triparadisus," Chapter XII, p. 28.

"Problema Theologicum," Cotton ticked off the many eminent British and European divines who had believed that the thousand years began not long after Christ's death. In "Triparadisus" he argued hotly in favor of a pre-millennial conflagration, noting that he would have been shocked to find one particular "learned man" denying this, had not such opinions been "so common among learned Men, that they are no longer to be wondered at." Increase acknowledged there were "many learned and judicious Authors who take the First Resurrection in a Political Sense, as if it were of the same Nature with the Resurrection of the Witnesses."[24] Throughout, no New England divines were mentioned by name, but the Mathers definitely had some of their fellow clergymen in mind.

Cotton's "Problema" is a case in point. Though never printed, it circulated among interested New England scholars. Originally, the manuscript was written in the form of a letter to Nicholas Noyes, but Cotton revised it by excising the personal addresses. The material crossed out indicates that in arguing Christ would return before the thousand years, he was trying to make a "proselyte" out of Noyes. His first version read, "If you will not be thus persuaded, You must be so Charitable as to give me your Help, in answering the ensuing Arguments."[75] Noyes never published a formal treatise on

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[74]Cotton Mather, "Problema," p. 17; "Triparadisus," Part III, Chap. I. Increase Mather, Dissertation Concerning the Future Conversion, p. 20.

[75]Sewall, Diary, II, 118; Cotton Mather, "Problema," p. 23.

the Revelation, but there is evidence that the pastor at Salem —a man "deep studyed in the Revelations"—did indeed differ with the Mathers.[76]

Noyes published some of his own ideas in a sermon entitled New England's Duty and Interest to be an Habitation of Justice. It was officially blessed with a preface by John Higginson, one of the few ministers old enough to remember the time when John Cotton advised Oliver Cromwell "that to take from the Spaniards in America would be to dry up the sixth vial of Euphrates, which was one thing put Him on his Expedition to Hispaniola." Higginson had been ready then to help fulfill prophecy by volunteering his ministerial labors, and now he advised readers that the scriptural promises were still grounds for faith, hope and prayer.[77] The particular predictions which interested Noyes were those promising a "Restauration, Reformation, and Blessing" to formerly degenerate churches. This, he assumed, was what the resurrection of the witnesses referred to—an interpretation which in itself was standard enough. But Noyes' discussion of the restoration of the witnesses merged into a description of the millennium without any mention of Christ's coming or an attendant conflagration. Righteousness would spread over Asia, Europe and America, as "the Kingdoms of the world [became]

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[76]John Barnard, "Sketch of Eminent Ministers in New England," Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society (1st ser.; Boston, 1809), X, 168.

[77]Sewall, Diary, I, 437; Noyes, New England's Duty, Preface.

the Kingdoms of Our Lord." The metaphors referred to the state of the church instead of Christ himself: it was "his day," not "his coming"; and it was compared with Luther's original revolt, as a "Second Reformation, which, when it cometh, will carry all before it."[78]

In dealing with the extent of the millennial empire, Noyes had to deal with the conjectures about America's fate. He disposed of Thomas Burnet's theory that the Indians were not descended from Noah simply by treating it with disdain: the natives were indeed "beholden to him, that he let them descend from Adam; and did not bring them out of the Slime, as he doth Gog and Magog"—a notion Noyes clearly considered ridiculous. But Mede's theory was a more formidable one, and even more distasteful. That America should be headquarters for Gog and Magog, or Hell itself, was "worse and worse still!" This was treading on tender ground however, since only the year before, his friend Increase Mather had drawn that gloomy conclusion:

> I know there is a blessed day to the visible Church not far off; but it is the Judgment of very Learned men, that in the Glorious Times promised to the Church on Earth, America will be Hell.... I am very afraid that in the process of Time, New England will be the wofullest place in all America.

This demanded tact on Noyes' part; yet behind the tact there was perhaps a slight reproof. "I believe some monitory Expressions of men much better than myself; have been wrested beyond their Intention," he said, "and that the same persons

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[78]Noyes, New England's Duty, pp. 64-68.

hope better things concerning New England...and I believe that they are as good friends as any in the Land."[79] Noyes was indeed walking a tightrope; as he pointed out, others asked why America might not be "the New Jerusalem, or part of it." He avoided committing himself to any particular solution, no doubt partly out of scholarly caution, but also quite probably because the latter opinion belonged to another friend and fellow expositor, Samuel Sewall.

Sewall studied the prophecies as much as anyone in New England, as just about any of his acquaintances must have known. There was scarcely any way to know him and not realize it: he had a habit of carrying pamphlets and books with him on his visits, and often his friends found an apocalyptic tract in their hands at his departure. A dozen of his Phenomena were packed off to Barbadoes and Mexico; one to the governor; John Cotton's book "on the Vials" to Ebeneezer Pemberton; copies of Willard's prophetic Fountain Opened to "as many as were in Council"; and on and on. If he was not discussing resurrected wombs with Mr. Dudley, he might well be asking Mr. Bolt "whether [Negroes] should be white after the Resurrection" (Bolt thought it absurd—the body would be "void of all Colour"); or pleading with Mr. Brinsmead to pray for the drying up of Euphrates. Even his artillery company could not escape his eschatology. Captain Sewall awarded crack marksman John Noyes a silver cup engraved with

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[79] Ibid., pp. 69-75; Increase Mather, A Discourse Concerning the Uncertainty of the Times (Boston, 1697), p. 35.

"Euphratem Siccare potes," and now every time Ensign Noyes dried up his own cup, he could wish the same might happen to the Euphrates under the sixth vial![80]

Sewall's main interest lay in championing one particular cause—and he went about it in his usual energetic way. It seemed to him the pouring of the sixth vial referred to a diminishing of the antichristian empire in America. This was, to say the least, unorthodox: although expositors were able to disagree on just about any detail, one of the few things virtually all of them assented to was that the sixth vial encompassed the end of the Turkish woe and the conversion of the Jews. Sewall thought the point worth arguing however, and suggested that one of the topics for debate at the Harvard commencement of 1696 might be "Res Antichristiana in America, Est Euphrates ille Apocalyptica in quam Angelus Sextus effundit phialem suam?" When that proposal did not take, he proceeded to print up "a pretty many copies" of the question to send to his friends. The result was a set of "long and elaborat Answers by way of Opposition." Sewall replied to these and then sent to the press his formal rebuttal, the Phenomena quadaem Apocalyptica.[81]

The conclusions he drew from his interpretation were quite hopeful for America. If indeed the Jews' conversion

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[80] Sewall, Diary, II, 140, 253, 305; I, 69: II, 55.

[81] Samuel Sewall, Letter Book, Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society (2 vols.; 6th ser., I-II; Boston, 1887), I, 227-28.

came at the same time, then this would fit nicely with John Eliot's old theory that the Indians were descended from the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel. The obvious deduction from all of this was that America "stands fair for being made the Seat of the Divine Metropolis." This was not a mere expression of New England local pride, since Boston and its environs was not the proposed site. Sewall's candidate was Mexico, and his quaint arguments made it clear that England was still the center of the world for him:

> The situation of [the old] Jerusalem is not so Central; but that a Voyage may be made from London, to Mexico, in as little time, as from London to Jerusalem. ... If the City of the Great King should be sat on the Northern side of it [Mexico]: Englishmen would meet with no Inconvenience thereby; and they would find... they might visit the Citizens of the New-Jerusalem, and their Countrymen, all under one.

Barbadoes and Jamaica stood ready to welcome travellers on the way to Mexico, and the "New English Tirzah" would also be happy for a visit.[82]

Although Sewall's initial proposals had met with great opposition, not everyone disagreed with them. Both Nicholas Noyes and Cotton Mather respectfully mentioned the theory in their sermons, although they stopped short of endorsing it. Sewall received further comfort from Timothy Clark, who only a few years later pointed out that "a Line drawn to the Comet [recently observed] strikes just upon Mexico." Sewall excitedly discussed the rumors of a revolution there, and after seeing himself the results on Clark's globe, concluded, "Our

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[82] Sewall, Phenomena, pp. 1-2, 45.

Thoughts being thus confer'd and found to jump, makes it to me remarkable."[83] But even more immediate reaction came from John Wise. Some of his parishioners had been considering a move to the Carolinas, and Wise was considering going with them. If the increasing number of British settlements near Spanish strongholds indeed signalled the beginning of the sixth vial, then the ideas in the Phenomena seemed to be surprisingly confirmed. Wise thus thought he himself might be able to contribute more directly to antichrist's downfall by joining the attack. Sewall thanked him for his compliments ("I plainly saw that you had overvalued the crazy fining Pot, when as you ventured to pour into it so many great Hyperboles of Praise") and then gave his own diplomatic and more moderate reply to Wise's proposal. Certainly he had been glad to hear of the British settlements, and hoped that the Romish territories would

> fall flat as ever Jericho did. But now as to this or the other Officer in the Army, it matters not much where he [is] placed, provided he be in the Post where his General has set him. And your Fathers and Brethren in the Ministry who know your Circumstances, and the condition of the Church in Chebacko, can best adjust that for you....[84]

Wise, apparently convinced, remained in New England to fight his own wars there, much to the later distress of the Mathers.

Whether Wise agreed with the larger contours of Sew-

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[83] Sewall, Diary, II, 53.

[84] Sewall, Letter Book, I, 196. See also the New England Historical and Geneological Register (Boston, 1876), XXX, 64.

all's interpretation is not known, but if he did, that would only have added to his disagreements with the Mathers. Sewall was less convinced by Whiston than either Cotton or Increase, and had not moved the vials to the future. Instead, he followed Mede's scheme and argued that five had thus far been emptied. And where Whiston was convinced that the witnesses had already been slain, Sewall continually argued it was "past doubt" with him that this was not so. This conclusion had larger implications; for if the witnesses had not risen, it was a mistake to think as the Mathers did that 1716 would be a signal year in the war against the beast. "As for 1716," he wrote one correspondent in New Hampshire, "it is the year that excellent Mead pitched upon above four score years agoe, as appears by his setting up the Ten Kings Ano $\frac{456)}{1260)}$ 1716. But being arrived at it, I can't receive the consolation that some doe."[85]

Apparently the Mathers were not alone in having great hopes. Noyes too was convinced the witnesses had been slain, although his calculations were slightly different from Mede's or Whiston's. Pastor John Williams, famous for surviving capture by the French and Indians, wrote Sewall of his enthusiastic hopes; and Jeremiah Dummer reported from England that the "Apocalyptical Men" there thought there was a "Comfortable Prospect" of antichrist's ruin.[86] Sewall answered them

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[85]Sewall, Phenomena, p. 20; Letter Book, I, 374; II, 53.

[86]Sewall, Diary, II, 99; Letter Book, II, 63, 83.

all the same way, sticking to his point on the witnesses, noting that Mede had given his opinion "with a great deal of Modesty," and wishing that "they who so confidently and peremptorily fixed and proclaimed 1716 as the Year of Jubilee would make some Apology for themselves, lest otherwise they become guilty of depreciating the Prophesie."[87] He had support from his son Joseph, who preached a sermon at the beginning of 1717 from Habakuk: "For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry." The approving father commented that "Possibly some might not be well pleased, But others think people had been long enough held with the too Confident Affirmations that have been advanced."[88]

Thus the temporary disappointment of the Mathers' hopes served only to confirm Sewall in his opinions. As the years went on, and Cotton seemed to stress more and more the imminence of Christ's coming, Sewall noted with disapproval his "vehemently insisting on the Conflagration, so that he seems to think there is no general Calling or Convertion of the Jews, Or that it is already past and gone."[89] This scrap of evidence is tantalizing, since it implies that Sewall may well have agreed with those who placed the fire at the end of

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[87] Sewall, Letter Book, II, 63-65, 78, 83.

[88] Ibid., p. 65.

[89] Ibid., p. 263.

the millennium. He did not discuss the conflagration elsewhere, but there are hints that his millennial world differed materially from the Mathers' fire-refined, paradise state. The Mexican New Jerusalem appeared a little more down to earth than an immortally populated city in the clouds. And when Benjamin Wadsworth observed that Europe was a likelier location because of all the splendid buildings, Sewall replied that "the Beauty and Grandeur of the New Jerusalem will consist chiefly, in Humility, Purity, Self-Denial, Love, Peace, and Joy in Believing." As for Europe's splendor, "what signify the most sumptuous and magnificent Buildings of Europe? God will as readily Tabernacle in our Indian Wigwams as enter into them."[90]

Saying this did not necessarily mean that love, peace and joy would be the only qualities present: conceivably immortal saints and glorious thrones might be a part of the new worlds too. But that was not how William Williams of Hatfield interpreted the Phenomena when Sewall sent him a copy. Williams' reading on the subject was less full—he was not acquainted with Mede's opinion on Gog and Magog in America—but he said he agreed with Sewall's view that the New Jerusalem meant "the Spiritual glory of the Church in purity, holiness, and peace." And this definitely did not mean "glorified Saints descending from Heaven and assuming their bodies," since to Williams' way of thinking, there were a number of

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[90] Ibid., p. 201.

flaws in that hypothesis. If only immortal saints lived in the New Jerusalem, then why did the scriptures describe that time as one when men would still live under the covenent, be guaranteed freedom from persecution, and have the gospel available to those who still thirsted for it? These were things only mortals needed; and thus the Revelation "doth not speak of a bodily but a political [first] resurrection, and that the church which hath been persecuted and slain under Antichrist shall revive again and be brought into a prosperous and flourishing condition."[91]

Williams may have been a relatively new convert to the theory at the time he wrote Sewall in 1728, but Benjamin Colman had long before declared his support.[92] As early as 1707, Colman stressed that God purposely hid the time of Christ's coming in order to "teach us Modesty in our Enquiries after them." He noted with disappointment (and perhaps with reference to Cotton's hopes in the late 1690's) that "Some good Men have been too Curious and Positive...and have been rebuked for their bold Conjectures, by living to see themselves confuted." Nevertheless, there were some facts which the prophecies had disclosed. Christ would not come until the very end of the world. Before then, antichrist would fall from his great power; there would be "a further Enlargement of the Kingdom of Christ, and the Conversion of the

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[91] Ibid., pp. 250-52.

[92] Williams said he had held his views "for several years." Ibid., p. 250.

Jews"; and in addition to that, "a Time also of the Church's Peace and Tranquility, Purity and Holiness, beyond what has hitherto been known." In other words, Christ would not appear until after a "great and general Desertion" from God's ways at the end of the millennium, when he would conquer Gog, Magog and Satan once and for all. Colman insisted that the times of all these events "no man can proportion or adjust," and that however pleasant it would be to hope that God would use miracles to bring about the changes, "yet this also is secret to him."[93]

Of course, given Benjamin Colman's better known disagreements with the Mathers, it is perhaps not surprising to see him at odds with them again. More illuminating is the position taken by the impeccably orthodox author of the Compleat Body of Divinity, Samuel Willard. Along with the Mathers, he was one of the most prolific writers of his day; and one of the books Samuel Sewall was constantly bestowing on his friends was The Fountain Opened. Willard believed like all other New Englanders that the millennium was yet to come: Christ the fountain had been opened first in the gospel, but there was also a "more particular" time of His benefits approaching.[94] Yet Willard, who was nothing if not methodical, took time to discredit the notions of men like

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[93]Benjamin Colman, Practical Discourses (London, 1707), pp. 416-20.

[94]Samuel Willard, The Fountain Opened (Boston, 1700), pp. 106-14.

Augustine and Brightman that the thousand years had already passed or was now in progress. If Brightman thought the millennium had already begun, said Willard, then he thought too little of God's promises. To be sure, the happy times were not part of the church's final triumphant reign: while on earth it was still in its imperfect, militant state. Although the scriptures sometimes spoke of "the Triumphant state," Willard agreed with Brightman that

> it would be a delusion to apply them to its Militancy. There must also be an allowance made for our supposing the Spirit of God, who condescends to speak to us in our own Language, to use Hyperbolical expressions, and set forth the better condition of the Militant church upon the Earth with words borrowed from the state of Glory to which it shall at length arrive: but we must not think that he goes about to delude us with flourishing Promises, and then put us off with low and little performances.

Willard may have had more in mind than thoroughness in taking time to dispose of a straw man like Brightman, especially since no one in New England held his theory. Increase and Cotton Mather's descriptions of saints refined and made instantly immortal by the conflagration sounded suspiciously like prophetic interpretations which confused the church triumphant with the church militant. And Willard also seemed to deny the possibility of a paradise on earth when he argued that "the gradual Communications of this good to the Church" throughout time would in the last days "arrive to a fulness, not of absolute, but comparative perfection."[95] Yet the Fountain could hardly be called a definite repudiation of the

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[95] Ibid., pp. 115, 118.

Mathers' chiliasm. Its criticism—if indeed present—was still quite allusive.

Willard made his position plainer the following year in The Checkered State of the Gospel Church. The title itself foreshadowed the sermon's thesis that it was sheer vanity to "expect all light in the Church of God in this world." True enough, a time was coming when "the priviledges of the Church both spiritual and temporal shall be great to admiration, but still it will have a mixture of darkness in it."[96] Of course, one way to escape this conclusion was to deny that the millennium would be part of the church militant. If the church triumphant began at judgment when the saints were raised, and the last judgment actually encompassed the millennium as the Mathers' believed; then there would be no contradiction in a worldly paradise. But Willard specifically denied such a thesis. The millennium would "not be after the great and last day of Judgment is begun," he said. "Some have not only conjectured, but also confidently asserted this; but I cannot be of their perswasion." One reason they were mistaken came "from their supposing the time [of the millennium] is not yet as begun, and [their] thinking it hard to believe that the Judgment shall be deferred a thousand years from the beginning of it." But Willard reminded his listeners (not to mention the Mathers) that a thousand years

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[96] Samuel Willard, The Checkered State of the Gospel Church (Boston, 1701), p. 22.

was only a day in the Lord's sight.[97]

And as if that had not been clear enough, Willard continued to hammer away at his point from another angle: what was meant by the second coming? The scriptures said the thousand years would begin "with a bright appearing of Christ, by which the destruction of Antichrist will be wrought." But this was hardly part of the day of judgment; merely an "earnest" of it. Paul had indeed written in his letters to the Thessalonians that Jesus would slay "the lawless one" "with the breath of his mouth and destroy him by his appearing and his coming," but "some have (I think) needlessly applied [it] to his coming to the last Judgment; for there are other comings of his in the Power of his Kingdom." Jesus very likely would not appear "to the lower world in his Humanity" until the final judgment.[98]

Thus Christ's coming was figurative, and not inaugurated by a catastrophic conflagration. In fact, the glorious times might well "begin ere we are aware of it; inasmuch as it is rationally to be supposed that this light will have its gradual increase, & not attain to its Meridian at once, as the darkness into which the Church went, in its retirement into the wilderness, was gradual." Even during the thousand year reign, the church would have its enemies in the world; it was just that they would be kept under control. And were there any further proof needed, the final appearance of Gog

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[97] Ibid., pp. 52-53.

[98] Ibid.

and Magog "indisputably" made it clear "that the Church will all this while remain in a condition which renders them in themselves liable to the malices of adversaries."[99] In short, it would have been hard for Willard to have been more firm in his opposition to the Mathers' eschatology.

III

What can we deduce after wading through all of these apocalyptical conjectures? One conclusion at least is clear: the boundaries of millennial thought are certainly more complicated than the traditional pre- and post-millennial classifications indicate. Except for a few cases like Jeremiah Burroughs and possibly Thomas Goodwin, expositors never believed that Christ would literally descend for a bodily reign for a thousand years on earth. Indeed, if any major distinction were to be made between a pre- or post-millennial eschatology, it would be more properly based on the question of whether or not the last judgment encompassed the thousand year reign. Willard for one made this clear in his discussion of the differences implied in viewing the millennium as part of the church militant or the church triumphant. Consequently, the more crucial question was the meaning of the first resurrection. If it was a literal one, then it inaugurated the last judgment, still considered only a day because

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[99] Ibid., p. 58. See also Willard, Fountain Opened, p. 117.

(as Increase argued, using the same scripture Willard cited to prove the opposite point) one day is as a thousand in God's eyes.[100] Thus Daniel Whitby, whom some have called the first English post-millennialist, chose to state on his title page that the millennium was "not a Reign of Persons Raised from the Dead, but of the Church Flourishing gloriously for a Thousand Years after the Conversion of the Jews," rather than phrasing the issue in terms of Christ's second coming.[101]

Furthermore, New Englanders were no more successful than their English counterparts in attempting to agree on an objectively based interpretation of the prophecies. Historians have generally taken the Mathers' views as representative, partly because Increase and Cotton as a rule beat everybody else to the press, and partly because the debate itself was often abstruse and allusive. In fact, the Mathers were quite unable to impose their brand of chiliasm on everyone else—much to their distress. Cotton lamented that "mankind will have no more [apprehensions?] of any mighty and sudden change...coming upon the world," in part because

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[100] Increase Mather, Dissertation Concerning the Future Conversion, p. 14.

[101] Daniel Whitby, A Treatise of the True Millennium, in A Paraphrase and Commentary of the New Testament (London, 1727). Whitby's book is a further indication that a political interpretation of the first resurrection was present before the Awakening. I have not treated it in my discussion of English expositors here because there are other earlier examples of similar positions, such as Henry More; and because early eighteenth century New Englanders did not depend on it as a guide. For a more detailed discussion of Whitby's views, see below, Chapter 4.

expositors were "deluding them into an Imagination, of Happy Times to arrive, and be Long Enjoy'd by the church of God upon Earth, before the coming of the Lord. In a word, All fast Asleep!"[102] Thus Edwards' interpretation of the first resurrection as political and Christ's coming as figurative was by no means novel: it had the support of eminent men like Benjamin Colman and Samuel Willard.

Yet for all their diversity, there were some points about which expositors could agree; and these are perhaps as interesting as their differences. No one, for instance, denied the general meaning of the seven vials, or the death and resurrection of the witnesses. The vials were plagues that God poured out in order to destroy antichrist; and the witnesses were resurrected in a metaphorical and political sense rather than a literal one. But if this was the case, what becomes of the thesis that the pre-millennialist view of the end of history was an incurably gloomy one? If the vials were poured out only one at a time, would that not indicate gradual improvement in the condition of the world? And if the churches, as witnesses for Christ, were elevated to positions of dignity and authority before He came, how could things be said to decline into a last, sinful state?

Thomas Goodwin, who believed in a corporeal first resurrection, argued that the raising of witnesses would be a forerunner of the actual millennium: "So glorious shall the

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[102] Cotton Mather, "Triparadisus," Part II, Chapter VII.

condition of these witnesses be, in comparison of what it was before, that it shall justly be counted a heaven, if compared with their former best condition before their killing." William Allen had forecast a paradise state, but still held that prophecies often had gradual fulfillment; and that the seven vials were means by which "the Beast is gradually brought down." Samuel Lee thought antichrist had been in a "waining, withering State ever since the days of Luther," which made good sense, since God's purpose was "to manage the ruine and extirpation of the Churches Enemies by degrees; not all at once."[103] Even the Mathers seemed ambiguous on this point. Cotton—at least until the last few years of his life—believed there would be "symptoms" of the coming time which were hardly bad news for the church. More than once he "wrestled with the Lord" until He revealed "that a mighty Convulsion shall be given to the French Empire" and that England, Scotland and Ireland would be "speedily Illuminated, with glorious Anticipations of the Kingdome of God." Increase noted that when the seventh trumpet sounded and the pouring of the vials began, the kingdoms of the world would "Gradually become the Kingdoms of Christ, until the whole World is become Christendom."[104]

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[103] Goodwin, Works, III, 193; Allen, Of the State of the Church, p. 33; Samuel Lee, Dissertation, pp. 13-14, and Ecclesia Gemens (London, 1677), p. 8.

[104] Cotton Mather, Diary, I, 207-08; Increase Mather, Dissertation Wherein the Strange Doctrine, pp. 92-93 (his italics), also pp. 99-102.

Nor does the evidence support the notion of the inactive pre-millenialist who passively waited for Christ's catastrophic arrival. A mere glance at Cotton Mather's frenetic career is enough to scotch that generalization. And Cotton's eschatology provided an eminently logical incentive for his activity: had he not believed the conflagration was imminent, he would have deceived himself into a lethargic expectance of good times: "In a word, All fast Asleep!" Of course, this answer fails to deal with a more refined version of the argument: that the nature of the activity provoked by catastrophism was fundamentally different from that aroused by gradualism. This will be dealt with in the following chapters.

But exploding these stereotypes only presents another quandary. The evidence just given seems to suggest that it was wrong to criticize those who saw Jonathan Edwards as anticipating later optimistic theories of history. Perhaps far from being the first major forerunner, Edwards was only one in a steady line of those who believed in a gradualism much like the one incorporated by the secular idea of progress. But that would hardly do justice to these expositors. For all their professed beliefs in the gradual fall of the beast, they spoke of difficult and gloomy times ahead. Goodwin may have believed that the vials betokened a slow decline of the beast, but he also thought that "that last scattering [of the church] will be so great a one as all the faith you have will be put to it." William Allen still included the climactic

battle of Armageddon, as did Samuel Lee.[105] And no talk of gradual revolutions could eliminate the Mathers' belief in the conflagration. Nor was this confusing attitude confined to those who believed in a literal first resurrection inaugurated by the fire. Samuel Willard spoke of "the last and worst times, preceding the great Reformation which is expected"; and Sewall apparently thought the good times would be directly preceded by those of "Unparallel'd Severity."[106]

All this leads to our own gloomy conclusion: with the end of the chapter in sight, millennial scholars and their ways of thinking seem if anything even more confusing than before. This much seems certain: interpreters failed to find meaning in history through an agreement on the order and arrangement of its last events; and as a result, New England parishioners could hardly have held very consistent or coherent opinions. Indeed, Increase Mather confessed as much in a sermon to his flock which touched briefly on his belief in the literal first resurrection. He mentioned that he had discussed the subject in a dissertation printed the year before in London, but did not elaborate on the point, since he thought "it to be a Problem fitter for Scholastical Argumentations, than to be handled in the Pulpit before a Popular

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[105] Goodwin, Works, III, 118; Allen, Of the State of the Church, pp. 119-50; Lee, Dissertation, pp. 118-19.

[106] Samuel Willard, Peril of the Times Displayed (Boston, 1700), p. 14; Sewall, Phenomena, preface.

Auditory."[107] Insofar as our own interpretation of millennial thought attempts to unravel prophetic logic through an understanding of chronology and specific events, it fails as much as expositors of the Apocalypse failed in their own quest for meaningful agreement.

But perhaps that quest was not the most important one for millennialists. As hotly as Increase defended the literal first resurrection, he seemed to feel other things deserved to be stressed when preaching a practical sermon. If the particular details of the last days were not paramount, then possibly the general ways and means God used to act in history might be. Perhaps the new departure of post-awakening Calvinism was a basically different attitude towards the mechanisms of the church's salvation—a view of history which managed to purge New England millennialism of its strange combination of simultaneous gloom and optimism. Assessing the validity of this conjecture demands an understanding of the boundaries New Englanders set, both before and after the Awakening, between the natural and supernatural powers God used for his providential action in history. The next chapter deals with that question.

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[107] Increase Mather, A Discourse Concerning Faith and Fervency, xvii.

Chapter 3

JUDGMENT

Anyone who has even a passing acquaintance with the Christian Apocalypse knows that John did not choose to end his world with a whimper. Christ's return to judge the quick and the dead provided a spectacular, supernatural climax to the long drama of redemption. Nor did John confine his miraculous imagery to descriptions of the very end of time. The visions of the war throughout history between the dragon and the Lamb depended heavily on the language of the supernatural and the violent. The sixth seal predicted a "great earthquake" after which "the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as the fig casteth her untimely figs when she is shaken of a mighty wind." The woe trumpets listed a whole string of prodigies, including hail and fire mixed with blood, the burning of a third of the earth, seas turned to blood, and fiery mountains thrown into the seas. The vials of wrath catalogued similar woes, and in all, the Revelation mentioned falling stars at least three times, and great earthquakes at least four. Strangely enough, John remained mute on the subject of the conflagration, noting only that the old earth would "pass away" (Rev. 21:1) to make way for the new heavens and earth.

But other Old and New Testament scriptures provided ample enough reinforcement. Peter's oft-quoted second epistle described the "day of the Lord" which would come like a thief in the night, when the heavens would "pass away with a great noise and the elements...melt with fervent heat."[1] Old Testament prophets employed similar imagery, noting that the earth would "reel to and fro like a drunkard" and the mountains melt like wax before the fire. Matthew and Mark reported that Jesus himself gave a long list of signs preceding his second coming, including famines and earthquakes, false prophets performing deceptive wonders, and the usual darkening of the sun and moon, and falling of stars.[2] In short, the Bible provided ample material for those inclined to make use of the violent, the catastrophic, the supernatural. Were eighteenth century ministers so inclined?

The question is a logical one to ask at this point. If the last chapter was correct in concluding that eighteenth century millennialists could not easily be classified according to the way they arranged the events predicted for the latter days, then we are forced to look elsewhere to discover the elements of millennial thought which either united men in a common eschatological perspective, or divided them into opposing camps. This chapter begins by considering the possibility that a man's attitudes and actions varied according to

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[1] II Peter 3:10.

[2] Isaiah 24:20; 34:4; Micah 1:4; Matthew 24; Mark 13.

how much he emphasized the supernatural aspects of God's plan of redemption. An expositor who often relied on a miraculous interpretation of the prophecies might well behave differently from someone who believed Biblical predictions would be fulfilled naturally.

Yet it is not always easy to imagine what these differences would be—or perhaps too easy. There are several ways one might reconstruct natural and supernatural logics—each of them plausible enough, yet at the same time contradictory in their conclusions. Here, for instance, are two hypothetical models which attempt to distinguish certain kinds of millennial attitudes. They both begin by differentiating between a miraculous and a natural accomplishment of the prophecies, but end with different sets of millennial psychologies.

Hypothetical Reconstruction No. 1: For medieval man, a supernatural end to the world provided an eminently satisfying moral conclusion to history. The final conflagration, the second coming, all the attendant earthquakes and famines were parts of an immutable guarantee that no matter how much the wicked seemed to triumph in the present age, God would supernaturally set the scales of justice aright at the Day of Judgment. But with the advance of science, the wonders of eschatology were tamed and made regular along with the rest of the world. No longer was there a need to have supernatural forces effect the conflagration and final convulsions: natural processes could account for the events just as well. But this inevitably raised the spectre of a mechanistic,

meaningless end to the world. If the chain of cause and effect which led to the cataclysmic finale proceeded apace regardless of how the moral world behaved, could the final destruction of the world properly be called a judgment? Divines as well as natural scientists would be faced—no matter how they attempted to hide it—with the prospect of nature deprived of mind, and catastrophe robbed of its meaning.[3]

Hypothetical Reconstruction No. 2: A supernatural end to the world meant that only God could purge the evils from the existing vale of tears. If antichrist could be defeated only with the aid of divine earthquakes, and if the millennium could begin only with the help of a miraculous conflagration and literal resurrection of martyrs, there would be little incentive for believers to redeem the world themselves. The only course open would be to wait patiently and passively until deliverance came from heaven. On the other hand, if the millennium could be brought about naturally, men could play a role in its accomplishment. Believers who knew that God was depending on their efforts would surely act more forcefully than those who merely waited for the holocaust to

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[3]This is essentially the theory presented in Perry Miller, "The End of the World," Errand into the Wilderness (Cambridge, Mass., 1956), pp. 217-39, a superb essay which studied the apocalyptic genre while providing yet another example of it. Miller argued that the men who formulated or accepted the new naturalistic theories realized, with sometimes unconscious dread, that they were denying their world "the beauty of the unmixed and wholly God-administered fatality" (p. 200).

solve the world's problems.[4]

The two reconstructions, we should note, arrive at different conclusions because their primary focus is on different events. By concentrating on the last judgment, the first model assumes that naturalistic theories left believers uneasy and anxious, their whole system threatened by a loss of the moral purpose so much a part of that traditional day. By concentrating on the millennium, the second model assumes that naturalistic theories had the opposite effect, producing an active optimism unhampered by the need for supernatural intervention. The first hypothesis ends with a vision of catastrophe without meaning; the second, a vision of meaning without catastrophe.

The claims of both theories, however much they differ, suggest that the next logical step in our inquiry ought to be a closer investigation of the boundaries men drew between the natural and supernatural aspects of the history of redemption —not so much because one hypothesis needs to be proved right and the other wrong, but because both address the central problem of this study: discovering the motivations and logic behind New Englanders' interest in the prophecies.

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[4]This is one line of reasoning pursued in the theories discussed above, Chapter 1. See especially Heimert, Religion and the American Mind, Chapter 2; and Tuveson, Redeemer Nation, Chapter 2.

I

Despite the wealth of supernatural imagery in the Revelation, expositors did not interpret much of it literally. Most agreed with Mede that the visions of the seven seals and many of the trumpets had already been fulfilled; and that placed a natural check on the wholesale use of the miraculous. If the seals, for instance, referred to events surrounding the fall of the Roman empire, then interpreters would be hard pressed to talk of literal rivers of blood or an actual cascade of stars, when records made no mention of such things.[5] In addition, men like Mede were well enough aware of scientific developments to know that stars could not possibly fall to earth; not because God would hesitate to work miracles, but simply because the description outlined a physical impossibility. Stars were "either as big, or many times bigger than the globe of the earth," and hence there was no possible way for them to "fall" to the earth, even miraculously.[6]

Furthermore, Mede's astute scholarship showed that Biblical writers themselves intended much of their supernatural imagery to be interpreted metaphorically. Comparisons with Chaldean paraphrases written about the same time as the

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[5]See, e.g., Goodwin, Works, III, 45-46, and generally any of the English commentaries, where rivers of blood are interpreted to mean natural events, such as Elizabeth's persecution of Roman Catholics.

[6]Mede, Works, p. 615.

scriptures indicated that

> When the Prophets frequently speak of the Sun's being darkened in its going forth, the Moon not giving her light, and elsewhere of the Stars falling from Heaven upon the Earth (a phrase not to be understood Literally) the Targum renders these and the like Prophetic strains in words that signifie the diminution of the Glory and Felicity of the State, and the Downfall of the Grandees and Chiefs therein....[7]

Thus expositors agreed that the literal meaning of a passage could be dropped in favor of a metaphorical one, provided there was sufficient justification. But as usual, the question of what constituted sufficient justification remained a hazy one. Nearly everybody agreed that the resurrection of the witnesses ought to be interpreted metaphorically; when it came to deciding on another resurrection, that of the martyrs, opinions differed greatly.

One apparent conclusion which might be drawn from this is that interpreters with a literalistic, unyielding cast of mind tended to prefer supernatural readings of the prophecies, whereas those souls more inclined to the metaphorical opted for natural solutions. This was not always the case, however, as the scientific theories of Thomas Burnet and William Whiston demonstrate. Both men wrote treatises purporting to explain the processes involved in the creation, flood and final dissolution of the world, and while their interpretation of scripture was markedly literal, they hardly equated "literal" with "supernatural."

Burnet's imagination was first rate, as was his prose.

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[7]John Worthington, General Preface, in Mede, Works.

The Sacred Theory of the Earth, issued in 1681, seemed to have an ingenious explanation for everything. The lush paradise of Eden could be accounted for easily enough by assuming that the earth's original axis had not tilted towards the sun, thus assuring a perpetual spring. On the other hand, the increased heat of that same paradisical sun would bake the earth's thin crust until finally the breaking shell would release the floods of Noah's deluge. If a final conflagration seemed impossible because the oceans and polar regions would halt any far-reaching fire, that could be remedied by forecasting a series of droughts to produce a world where everything was tinder dry, and oceans and lakes greatly reduced, if not evaporated completely.[8] The state of the earth could hardly be more cheerless, and Burnet described it with suitable rhetoric:

> The Countenance of the Heavens will be dark and gloomy; and a Veil drawn over the Face of the Sun. The Earth in a Disposition everywhere to break into open Flames. The Tops of the Mountains smoaking; the Rivers dry, Earthquakes in several Places; the Sea sunk and retir'd into its deepest Channel, and roaring, as against some mighty Storm. These things will make the Day dead and melancholy....[9]

But when the fires finally cracked the crust, and Christ appeared, the end product would not leave the earth a mere charred wreck, since the molten remains would cool—just as they had at the original creation. The result would be a

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[8]Thomas Burnet, Sacred Theory of the Earth (6th ed.; London, 1726), II, 73-91. The sixth edition is used here because it contains Burnet's rejoineders to his critics.

[9]Ibid., p. 144.

millennial paradise free from pain or want, thanks again to an untilted axis of the earth.[10]

Whiston's theories were even more unorthodox. As a student, he had been quite taken with Burnet's hypothesis, and even defended it as part of the traditional exercises for his bachelor's degree. But further study of "Mechanical Philosophy" and Newton's work in particular convinced him that Burnet had not contrived a scientific enough method to get the earth's axis tilted properly. His own initial solution was to get a comet passing near enough to the earth "and in a certain trajectory, [that] it might [sufficiently] alter the Position of the Earth's Axis."[11] Subsequent calculations scotched that idea, but Whiston remained undaunted. His final grand and intricate theory worked everything out by bringing in a comet every time he needed to get his scenario over a rough spot.

In the first place, Whiston proposed that the creation story in Genesis referred merely to the origin of the earth, not the entire universe; and that the chaos from which the world evolved was none other than the mixed atmosphere of a comet whose dust slowly began to settle and congeal. For a

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[10]Perry Miller inexplicably omitted any mention of Burnet's millennium, making Whiston's supposed introduction of it an "incisive dramatization of what happened to the mind of western man at the end of the seventeenth century...." Errand into the Wilderness, p. 232.

[11]William Whiston, A Vindication of the New Theory of the Earth... (London, 1698), Preface. Whiston provides here an interesting history of his work on the Theory.

man who prided himself on his literal interpretation of the scripture, this view presented a distinct problem: Genesis explicitly said that the stars, sun and moon were created along with the earth. Whiston found his way out of the problem by supposing that since "the Prophets and Holy Penmen" were "seldom or never Philosophers," and the Hebrew people ill-prepared to understand scientific truth, God had revealed the origin in ways that would have made sense to them. The stars would seem as if they were newly created, when actually they had been there all along, visible now for the first time because the comet's atmospheric clouds had dispersed.[12] As for the Flood, it could be taken care of by assuming that the cool tail of another comet would set off torrential downpours when it intersected the earth's orbit on the way to the center of the solar system. And thousands of years later, if the earth was again bathed by a tail—this one already heated by its pass around the sun—then surely a huge conflagration would ensue. Conceivably, once Christ completed the final judgment, the earth itself might become a comet and for the rest of eternity roam the far reaches of the universe.[13]

Significantly, while both men's reading of the scriptures were more naturalistic than traditional interpretations, they were also more literal. Burnet realized that the prophecies of "the Obscuration of the Sun and Moon, Earth-

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[12]William Whiston, A New Theory of the Earth (London, 1696), pp. 27, 20.

[13]Ibid., pp. 126, 368, 378.

quakes, Roarings of the troubled Sea" were meant, according to many Interpreters, "to be understood only in a moral Sense." But he predicted that these things would be fulfilled literally through the natural processes leading to the conflagration. As the earth's axis tilted back to its original position, the motion of the globe would produce the illusion of the stars jarring and dancing about the heavens, something which seemed to Burnet very much like falling stars. In addition, the smoke and vapor from the volcanoes throughout the parched world would obscure the light of the sun and moon.[14] Whiston's theory assumed that the air would be "oppressed" with meteors (which looked like falling stars) as well as steam and exhalations, since the "Air must be clog'd and burthen'd" by the comet's vaporous tail.[15] All these phenomena were quite within the bounds of nature, and clearly indicate that a literal reading of the scriptures hardly needed to be a supernatural one.

And that was one of the things which bothered Burnet's and Whiston's readers: the new explanations seemed to rely too much on natural causes. John Keill, a mathematician and supporter of Isaac Newton, tried to disprove Burnet's hypothesis by showing "the impossibility of all Natural and Mechanical explications of the deluge whatsoever." He concluded that "tho' our holy Faith stands so well confirmed by real

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[14]Burnet, Sacred Theory of the Earth, II, 138-40.

[15]Whiston, New Theory of the Earth, pp. 209, 272.

miracles, that we are neither to make nor admit of any false ones, yet certainly we are not to detract from the value of the true ones, by pretending to deduce them from Natural and Mechanical causes...."[16] And Erasmus Warren, another opponent, accused Burnet of removing natural catastrophes from the realm of divine judgments. According to the Sacred Theory, the Flood was produced by a chain of natural causes which operated regardless of human behavior. But, asked Warren, what if Adam had not fallen? His descendants would have suffered the consequences of the deluge even though they had remained sinless. Catastrophic providences had thus been robbed of their meaning.[17]

Whiston too came under attack. One critic ridiculed the idea that Moses wrote Genesis "for the capacity of the Blockish Brick-makers that were newly come out of Egypt, and scarcely understood Common Sense, and therefore any Story of a Cock and a Bull would serve them." But once again an even greater flaw was the "rash folly to expect Mathematical Congruity in every Production, and to look for Mechanick Laws in the erecting of the Universe." Such theories gave aid and comfort to atheists.[18] Whiston also acknowledged that one of the objections which had been made to him privately was "That

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[16]John Keill, An Examination of Dr. Burnet's Treatise of the Earth (Oxford, 1698), p. 33.

[17]Erasmus Warren, Geologia, or a Discourse concerning the Earth before the Deluge (London, 1690), Chapter 6.

[18]John Edwards, Brief Remarks upon Mr. Whiston's New Theory of the Earth (London, 1697), pp. 1-2, 17.

my Mechanical Account of the Deluge implies it was no divine Judgment for the World's Wickedness; but from the Necessity of the Motion of the Comet and Earth, must have happen'd whether Men had repented or not; and so induces a rigid fatality...."[19]

But Whiston and Burnet had foreseen the objections and provided their own defenses. These followed three main lines of argument. In the first place, both men pointed out that their theories, however much they emphasized natural explanations, by no means excluded the miraculous. Burnet defended his use of mechanistic laws by arguing that a clockmaker was better esteemed if he made his clocks strike without having to do it himself every time; but at the same time, he admitted that to deny miracles "would be a Limitation of the divine Power and Will so to be bound up in second Causes." Thus, although the desiccation of the world might come about naturally, Burnet saw no harm in having supernatural help for the conflagration itself. If Nature was "not sufficient to work her own Destruction, let us allow Destroying Angels to interest themselves in the Work," he said, adding that no one could properly complain that God's providence was diminished by having his subalterns carry out the orders: "'Tis the true Rule and Method of it!" And of course, Christ's coming would be "wholly out of the way of natural Causes."[20] Similarly,

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[19]Whiston, Vindication, p. 30.

[20]Burnet, Sacred Theory of the Earth, I, 144-45; II, 98-103.

Whiston freely granted that his theory could account for events such as the creation of Adam and Eve only by granting the immediate influence of God.[21]

Secondly, Burnet and Whiston both emphatically denied that natural events would be deprived of their moral significance merely because they obeyed mechanistic laws. Speculation about whether the Flood would have served any purpose even if Adam had never fallen seemed only a short step away from blasphemy, according to Burnet. If this train of thought was allowed, what was to stop men from wondering if Christ would be of any use under the same circumstances? More to the point, it was "a Weakness...to think, that when a Train is laid in Nature, and Methods concerted, for the execution of a Divine Judgment, therefore it is not providential." God knew quite well the "Futuritions" of both the natural and moral world, "and hath so dispos'd the one, as to serve him in his just Judgments upon the other."[22] Whiston referred his own readers to Burnet's reply, and strenuously denied the presence of any "rigid Fatality" in his theory. "I believe the same," he said, "as to the Success of Prayer, the Interest of the Divine Providence, and the Deluge's being a proper effect thereof, as any other Christian does." Obviously, God in his prescience had foreseen "the Sins, and therefore Originally dispos'd the Comet's Course for the Punishment...."[23]

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[21]Whiston, A New Theory of the Earth, pp. 222 ff.

[22]Burnet, Sacred Theory of the Earth, II, 419-20.

[23]Winston, Vindication, pp. 30, 31.

Thirdly, both men realized that the line between the natural and supernatural aspects of God's plan was sometimes a difficult one to draw. Obviously, Christ's literal descent could only be accomplished miraculously. But the description of other providences sometimes remained hazy. One of Burnet's critics objected that the process of the earth's cooling described in the Second Theory would inevitably take much longer than the six days the Bible allotted for creation. That was certainly true, Burnet admitted, if God used an ordinary providence to do the job. But "if according to an extraordinary, [then] you may suppose it made in six Minutes, if you please. 'Twas plain Work, and a simple Process, according to the Theory; consisting of only such and such Separations, and a Concretion: and either of these might be accelerated, and despatch'd in a longer or shorter Time, as Providence thought fit."[24] Burnet had not scrapped his natural processes in favor of divine fiat; he merely called on a little miraculous help to speed them up. In the same way, although the flood had been caused naturally, Burnet assumed the voyagers in the ark never could have survived the perils of the raging waters "if there had not been a miraculous Hand of Providence to take care of them. But 'tis hard to separate and distinguish an ordinary and extraordinary Providence in all Cases, and to mark just how far one goes, and where the other begins." The proper balance, he thought, was "a

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[24]Burnet, Sacred Theory of the Earth, II, 404-05.

constant ordinary Providence, and an occasional extraordinary."[25]

Whiston made the connection even closer. He admitted, like Burnet, that "indeed, 'tis difficult enough, in several instances, to determine what is the effect of a natural and ordinary, and what of a supernatural and extraordinary Providence." But he used Newton's latest discoveries to prove his point.

> 'Tis now evident, That Gravity, the most mechanical affection of Bodies, and which seems most natural, depends entirely on the constant and efficacious, and if you will, the supernatural and miraculous Influence of Almighty God. And I do not know whether the falling of a Stone to the Earth ought not more truly to be esteem'd a supernatural Effect, or a Miracle, than what we with the greatest surprize should so stile, its remaining pendulous in the open Air; since the former requires an active Influence in the first Cause, while the latter supposes Non-annihilation only.[26]

From this point of view, almost anything that happened could be classified as miraculous, as John Edwards pointed out. Although a miracle could be defined in part as an event which surpassed finite power, Edwards argued that it also possessed the qualities of rarity and wonder.[27] Yet if not all divines were willing to agree with Whiston's definition of miracle, few would have quarrelled with his conclusion that where secondary causes had been used, God planned their natural and moral effects with infinite precision, ordering "the whole

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[25] Ibid., I, 144-45.

[26] Whiston, A New Theory of the Earth, p. 218.

[27] Edwards, Brief Remarks upon Mr. Whiston's New Theory, pp. 41-42.

System with every individual Branch of it, as to Time, Place, Proportion, and all other Circumstances...." It was merely a truism to state that God had "adjusted and contemper'd the Moral and Natural World to one another...."[28]

The explanations and refinements of the two Theories of the Earth may not have won over Burnet's and Whiston's critics, but they at least provide us with information which helps to refine our own initial hypotheses about millennialists' behavior.

For one, they indicate that some critics did fear that a mechanical explanation of the deluge and conflagration might rob those judgments of their moral significance. That would seem to support our first hypothesis. But a critic's prediction of what an opponent logically ought to believe is not always a dependable indication of that opponent's actual beliefs. Non-Calvinists have often argued that the doctrine of predestination would encourage a fatalistic hedonism; Cotton Mather feared that a belief in a distant conflagration would lull Christians into a sleepy complacency; and nineteenth century post-millennialists argued that those who waited for Christ's personal coming would do nothing to spread the gospel. Men who reject a particular doctrine are always willing to draw out of it consequences its adherents never wished to embrace. Whiston and Burnet both denied that their theories encouraged fatalism, and they effectively used

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[28]Whiston, A New Theory of the Earth, p. 219.

traditional arguments to back up their position. Like their more orthodox opponents, they believed that God's moral judgments were reflected in natural as well as supernatural events.

Whiston's and Burnet's treatises also suggest that the boundary between the ordinary and the extraordinary was not a line which could be easily used to distinguish different millennial psychologies. As Burnet said, where one kind of providence began and the other left off was hard to determine. Furthermore, the two Theories demonstrate that the essential element in the logic which predicts a passive eschatology is the catastrophic, not the supernatural. The reason that believers might be discouraged by a miraculous beginning to the millennium was that it made the establishment of God's kingdom depend on actions beyond the control of the faithful. But men had as little control over certain kinds of ordinary providences as they did over extraordinary ones. The natural flames produced by Whiston's comet, for instance, would be as sufficiently discouraging as a conflagration direct from the hand of God. In that case, the original focus of our inquiry has proved too narrow. Instead of concentrating exclusively on the boundary between the natural and supernatural, we ought to give more attention to how men's efforts related to all providences—both ordinary and extraordinary—whose immediate source was God. To rephrase our original question, did some students of the prophecies prefer to use catastrophes to explain unfulfilled predictions? And did others prefer to

rely on humanly instigated solutions?

A search through the apocalyptic commentaries for the answers to these questions leads to one immediate problem. Expositors, as we have seen, universally admitted that the prophecies were obscure and not readily understood until actually fulfilled. Although scholars were willing to construct tentative scenarios of the last days, the details of accomplishment were often qualified or hedged. William Allen, for instance, readily admitted that the battle of Armageddon would be an event of spectacular consequence. The prophecies, he noted, predicted that the final Christian victory would be accomplished "in an extraordinary way and out of the usual road of human power," since the enemy would undoubtedly outnumber the faithful and devour them unless God intervened. But the nature of that "extraordinary" intervention was not clear. The prophecy called for earthquakes, lightning and hail, but Allen declined to commit himself to either a literal or metaphorical interpretation. The most concrete suggestion he had was that God would provide for the "enemies falling out among themselves," thus rendering them easy prey for the Christian hosts.[29]

In light of the accepted canons of prophetic interpretation, Allen's refusal to commit himself to one solution was understandable. Certainly the Bible predicted that angels of the seven vials would unleash great earthquakes, but that did

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[29]Allen, Of the State of the Church in Future Ages, pp. 130-51.

not mean men were necessarily deprived of a part in the drama. As Mede had pointed out:

> Because God useth Angels as ministers of his providence, for moving and governing of the motions and changes of humane affaires: therefore those things that are brought to passe by the hands of many, are notwithstanding attributed to an Angel as it were the ruler and guide of the things to be done, after the common manner of speaking.

So perhaps the great earthquake was only "a great commotion of the Nations, and the alteration of Politique affaires...."[30] Perhaps the lightning and hail William Allen thought would be "out of the usual road of human power" would only amount to rogues falling out amongst themselves. In the case of events yet to come, the often accepted tactic was to hedge bets, await the actual outcome, and let the event interpret the prophecy the way all expositors admitted it should.

Unfortunately, that non-committal strategy does little to help historians learn more about New Englanders' attitudes towards ordinary and extraordinary providences. And even if it did, few of the colonists had the time to spend computing the orbits of comets, speculating on the effects of an untilted axis, or devoting a lifetime to writing lengthy commentaries like Mede's. Yet there may be a way to use the dictum on prophetic obscurity to advantage. Suppose we take the divines at their own word; assume that prophecies are interpreted by the event; and give them an event to work on. Tempt them, like Job, with a disaster or two and see how they

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[30]Mede, Key, Pt. II, 113-14.

react. In short, try to discover the relationship between catastrophe and eschatology by watching ministers interpret events rather than prophecies.

As Providence would have it, historians have been provided with two events which allow them to do just that. In 1727 and again in 1755, New England trembled, both literally and figuratively, as a result of earthquakes. Each time, ministers were summoned to their pulpits, and many of the sermons they delivered eventually found their way to the press: over twenty following the first quake and close to fifteen after the second. More than half of the sermons discussed the Revelation's prophecies of earthquakes in some detail; several more alluded to future events, but merely as further means of arousing sinners to reformation ("God's shaking the Earth now, may have made these future & more dreadful things, to be more Affecting").[31] The remainder treated the calamities without discussing their relation to the Apocalypse.

From one point of view, the sermons make rather monotonous reading. The ministers of New England chose their basic themes with a consistency that verged on boredom. The earthquakes could be nothing less than a terrible judgment on the prevailing sins of the land. Profane swearing, drinking, licentiousness and the usual catalogue of lapses made their dutiful appearance; and nearly every parishioner in New Eng-

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[31]Stephen Mix, Extraordinary Displays (New London, 1728), p. 32.

land must have heard the story of the jailer in Acts who threw himself at Paul's and Silas' feet during an earthquake, crying, "Syrs, what shall I do that I may be saved?" But if this consistency is boring by reason of repetition, it is also interesting because of the implications it has for the present inquiry. We had suspected that perhaps those men with a catastrophic view of history would take the opportunity afforded by the disaster to express one eschatological point of view, whereas those who considered super-human providences an inconsequential part of the prophecies would express another perspective—at least implicitly—by failing to connect the earthquakes with the latter days. But the consistency of the ministers undermines this suspicion. The themes of their sermons were affected very little by the addition or omission of prophetic material. An earthquake interpreted eschatologically received essentially the same treatment as an earthquake interpreted non-eschatologically.

Catastrophe, in other words, did play an important role in eschatology, but only because certain basic attitudes about providence were shared by all New Englanders—in 1755 as well as in 1727—and not just by one particular group of catastrophically oriented men. The next three sections of the chapter attempt to illustrate this point more fully. The first discusses a number of prevailing assumptions about earthquakes as catastrophes <u>per se</u>: that they were naturally caused, that they were inescapably meant as moral judgments, and that (most important) they were associated with other

moral judgments God accomplished by using men as his instruments. The subsequent sections examine how the divines who discussed the prophecies incorporated these basic assumptions into their eschatology. It concludes that ministers saw natural disasters as one proper part of the climax to history not because of a preference for any specific millennial chronologies (once again a wide range of opinion appeared on that subject); but because catastrophes fell under the more general category of moral judgments which the prophecies made clear were a necessary part of ultimate deliverance.

II

The tremors of 1727 and 1755 were relatively minor ones, but only in retrospect: no tremor of the earth is minor to anyone in the middle of it. In 1727, most people were on their way to bed at the end of an October sabbath, when "they heard first a gentle Murmur, like a small rustling Wind, and then a more noisy Rumbling, as of Thunder at some Distance," which grew louder and louder.[32] "The crashing Noise was very amazing to me," wrote Samuel Sewall. "For I was just warm in my Bed, but not asleep. The young people were quickly frighted out of the Shaking, clattering Kitchen, and fled with weeping Cryes into our Chamber, where they made a fire, and abode there till morning." Sewall maintained an outward

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[32]Thomas Foxcroft, The Voice of the Lord from the Deep Places of the Earth (Boston, 1727), p. 5.

magisterial calm, all the while thinking to himself of a certain "good Bishop and his Lady...who were buried in their Bed in the desolating Tempest in England; but I did not venture to tell my thoughts."[33] Almost thirty years later, the rumbling returned at 4:15 on a frosty November morning, sending glasses flying from shelves, seriously damaging close to a hundred chimneys in Boston, and cracking many more.[34]

Naturally enough, the sermons which followed rang the familiar changes on the themes of the Jeremiad that Perry Miller has described so well. But ministers realized they had another duty, however subordinate. The anxious parishioners who crowded into the meeting houses the morning after looked to them for an explanation of the more specific workings of the earthquake. As a result, preachers generally devoted parts of their sermons to explaining current scientific theories. Virtually everyone agreed that the recent disturbances were naturally caused, although they added that God could, of course, produce earthquakes supernaturally. "Some Earthquakes are from GOD immediately," said James Allin, noting the Biblical tremors at Sinai and the universal convulsion following the crucifixion.[35] Charles Chauncy was perhaps hiding less traditional views when he used the conditional

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[33] Sewall, Letterbook, II, 229.

[34] Charles Chauncy, Earthquakes a Token of the righteous Anger of God (Boston, 1755), Appendix; Jonathan Mayhew, The Expected Dissolution of All Things (Boston, 1755), Appendix.

[35] James Allin, Thunder and Earthquake (Boston, 1727), pp. 17-18.

"might have been" to discuss examples of supernatural earthquakes in the Bible; but he did acknowledge that those times fell in the age of miracles, "for which reason, it may probably eno' be supposed, that these also were effected by a supernatural operation."[36] The age of miracles had long ago ceased however, and God now preferred to use "the agency of second Causes" to accomplish his purpose.[37]

The natural mechanisms of the earthquakes remained the subject of speculation. Sermons sometimes mentioned the possibility of a "Windy Exhalation imprisoned in the Bowels of the Earth and wanting vent"; but most of them preferred to ascribe the cause to "Subterraneous Fires occasion'd by the Fermentation of Combustible Minerals in the Earth, such as Sulpher, Salt-Petre, Vitriol, &c."[38] Thomas Prince noted that Boyle's calculations had proved there was a "terrible Atmosphere over us, [of] which few are aware, that is found to press with the weight of above Two Thousand Pounds on every square Foot of the surface of the Earth." When the compressed air in subterranean caverns was allowed to escape through a newly opened crevice, other parts of the earth might cave in. "Whole Cities, and Mountains," Prince warned, had been swallowed up in this manner.[39] John Barnard used a

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[36] Chauncy, Earthquakes, p. 8.

[37] Allin, Thunder and Earthquake, p. 17.

[38] Ibid., p. 20.

[39] Thomas Prince, Earthquakes the Works of God (Boston, 1727), pp. 10-11.

simpler scientific metaphor to enlighten his listeners: just as tumult resulted when fire heated water, or met with gunpowder and air, so the smoldering elements in underground passages were roused into action.[40]

The only published sermon which reflected any uneasiness with the idea of a naturally caused earthquake was that of Thomas Paine, who told his congregation that "An Earthquake is wrought by the immediate mighty Power of God." Although he spent a significant portion of his time warning the audience of dangers inherent in an explanation relying on secondary causes, his ultimate position differed little from that of most New Englanders. "I don't hereby affirm, that God acts immediately without any Instrument in producing an Earthquake," he explained, but only that "God's Power is immediately ingaged, either by his own Interposition, or by him delegated to some Instrument." To be sure, scientific experiments had shown that a mixture of iron filings, sulfur and water would break out "first with hot Vapours, and then a Flame" after being buried in the ground, but that only suggested that secondary causes were one possible way of accomplishing the catastrophe. And besides, earthquakes seemed to be more arbitrary than many other strange phenomena. No one could predict when the tremors might begin, whereas such

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[40] John Barnard, Two Discourses Addressed to Young Persons (Boston, 1727), pp. 78-83. Further examples of natural explanations include Benjamin Colman, The Judgments of Providence (Boston, 1727), vi; Foxcroft, The Voice of the Lord, p. 22; John Rogers, The Nature and Necessity of Repentance (Boston, 1728), p. 44.

things as comets and eclipses, though "truly Wonderful," were yet behaving "in an orderly way, and by a necessity that belongs to their very nature."[41]

Paine's position, in other words, was not one of defiant supernaturalism, but merely a skepticism with available empirical evidence. Earthquakes might be naturally caused; then again, they might not. How was it possible to tell one kind of tremor from the other? "It looks hard to say that this was natural and that supernatural."[42] Like Burnet and Whiston, he thought the line between the ordinary and extraordinary a difficult one to draw.

So did Jonathan Mayhew. Like everyone else, he admitted that earthquakes in modern times were the product of second causes, and thus properly studied as a part of natural philosophy. But natural philosophy was "no more than the observing of facts, their succession and order; and reducing them to a general analogy; to certain established rules... called laws of nature, from their steadiness and constancy...." And how well, after all, did earthquakes and other unusual events fit into that framework?

> How many things are there in the natural world, which never have been, and perhaps never will be, reduced to such a general analogy...? How many phenomena are there, which we may call the irregulars, the anomallies, and heteroclites in the grammar...by which God speaks to us as really, as by his written oracles?

Underneath, of course, the regularity remained, even in the

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[41] Thomas Paine, The Doctrine of Earthquakes (Boston, 1728), pp. 14-16, 26-27.

[42] Ibid., pp. 14-15.

disposition of earthquakes. But not being able to perceive it made the event appear marvellous. And even if men knew all the applicable general laws, they could not account for the laws themselves, which (as Whiston had pointed out) were "mysterious and inexplicable." In effect, concluded Mayhew, "the whole natural world, is really nothing but one great wonder and mystery."[43]

Thus the question of whether earthquakes were naturally or supernaturally caused was an irrelevant one. God was responsible for all events in the world, whether directly or through mediate causes. Samuel Phillips echoed the sentiments of all the clergy when he claimed that it was "the most absurd and unreasonable Thing" for anyone to "cast off Fear, because Natural Causes may be assigned for Earthquakes; For does not the Great God, ordinarily, make use of Second Causes, for the bringing on, and executing such Judgments...?" Paine underscored the point, appropriately enough, by turning to eschatology: "What if it shall please God to set the World on Fire, at the last Day, by using natural second Causes (as is likely enough he will) will that at all obscure his immediate Power, engaged in that dreadful Action?"[44] Both Phillips and Paine thus made sure their parishioners would not miss the crucial point: while it was quite proper to speculate about

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[43]Jonathan Mayhew, A Discourse on Revelation XV:3-4 (Boston, 1755), pp. 25-28.

[44]Samuel Phillips, Three Plain Practical Discourses (Boston, 1728), pp. 110-11; Paine, The Doctrine of Earthquakes, p. 21.

mechanical secondary causes, the earthquakes were to be understood first and foremost as moral judgments from God. All the details of windy exhalations and sulphureous vitriol sank into insignificance when compared with this major premise.

Some historians have thought that Professor John Winthrop's Lecture on Earthquakes questioned the assumption that the earthquakes were moral judgments, and in effect mounted "a devastating attack on the prevailing concepts of the relationship of God to the universe." But Winthrop did not "ascribe earthquakes to purely physical causes" in any way that orthodox ministers did not.[45] He admitted that the tremor's "terrible desolations" could "justly be regarded as the tokens of an incensed DEITY," but felt that as a professor of mathematics and philosophy, his primary task was to explain the secondary causes of the event:

> For though I make no doubt, that the laws of nature were established...with a view, ultimately, to moral purposes; and that there is the most perfect coincidence, at all times, between GOD's government of the natural and of the moral world; yet it would be improper for me to enter into these disquisitions at this time, since my province limites me to consider this subject, only in the relation which it bears to natural philosophy.[46]

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[45] Clifford K. Shipton, Sibley's Harvard Graduates (14 vols.; Boston, 1873-), IX, 248. Raymond P. Stearns follows Shipton's view in Science in the British Colonies in America (Urbana, 1970), p. 649.

[46] John Winthrop, Lecture on Earthquakes (Boston, 1755), pp. 27, 29. Although I have seen no definite evidence of it, perhaps Winthrop denied in private the connection between God's moral and natural government. Ezra Stiles, for one, publicly held the opinion that the earthquake was not a moral judgment against New England, though in later life he changed his mind on the issue. See E. S. Morgan, The Gentle Puritan (New Haven, 1962), p. 170.

Winthrop stayed within his province when he attacked Thomas Prince's latest pronouncement on earthquakes. He argued not with Prince's theology—however much he disliked it—but with the inaccuracies and fallacies in the old minister's scientific theories. Prince had suggested that Franklin's latest electrical discoveries might provide an alternate hypothesis for explaining earthquakes. If electrical imbalances in the earth really were the source of the tremors, reasoned Prince, then did not the recent erection of lightning rods ("iron points") serve only to store more electricity in the ground, increase the imbalance of electrics and non-electrics, and so hasten further judgments?[47] Winthrop's reply showed that no such imbalance could occur, and that Prince's fears were unfounded; the newspaper controversy which ensued remained centered on these scientific points, although Winthrop's heavy sarcasm reproached the wailing jeremiad style which gained Prince so much influence among those "of the more timorous Sex."[48] The one time Winthrop did discuss the larger relationship between science and religion, he stressed the intimate connection of the two, something Prince actually never accused him of denying:

> The consideration of a DEITY is not peculiar to Divinity, but belongs also to natural Philosophy. And in-

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[47] Thomas Prince, Earthquakes the Works of God (2nd ed.; Boston, 1755), Appendix.

[48] Winthrop, Lecture on Earthquakes, pp. 32-38; and A Letter to the Publishers of the Boston Gazette (Boston, 1756), p. 7.

> deed the main business of natural Philosophy is, to trace the chain of natural causes from one link to another, till we come to the FIRST CAUSE...and accordingly, I have ever been careful to give my discourses this turn. To 'consider natural causes meerly as the powers and operations of material substances,' would be to consider them, not in a Philosophical, but in an atheistical view.[49]

Actually, Winthrop was perhaps most novel in his optimistic assessment of the effects of earthquakes. Divines had sometimes pointed out that God used tremors as favorable judgments to deliver his people from their enemies, or simply to manifest divine power. But most of the time, they discussed the catastrophes as warnings to the faithful of their sinful lapses.[50] Winthrop acknowledged that latter use, but also suggested they might be of help in improving the physical health of the world. Gravity, he pointed out, was continually compacting the earth into a tighter and tighter mass, and perhaps these earthquakes were the best means to loosen it up. Winds performed a similar function in mixing

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[49]Prince's side of the debate can be seen in the Boston Gazette, Jan. 26, and Feb. 23, 1756. See also March 1, where Winthrop obliquely apologizes for his intemperate reply. Further discussion of the controversy can be found in Theodore Hornberger, "The Science of Thomas Prince," New England Quarterly, IX (March, 1936), pp. 26-42; Eleanor Tilton, "Lightning Rods and the Earthquake of 1755," New England Quarterly, XIII (March, 1940), pp. 85-97; and Max Savelle, Seeds of Liberty (New York, 1948), pp. 94, 146 ff. These articles tend to see Prince as "harmonizer" of science and religion. Brooke Hindle, The Pursuit of Science in Revolutionary America (Chapel Hill, 1956), pp. 94 ff., and I. Bernard Cohen, Some Early Tools of American Science (Cambridge, Mass., 1950), p. 127, both realize that this rubric is somewhat anachronistic.

[50]For examples of the earthquake as a means of deliverance, see Thomas Foxcroft, The Earthquake, A Divine Visitation (Boston, 1756), p. 33; and Chancy, Earthquakes, a Token, p. 13.

fresh and putrified air, which people more generally recognized, and yet great gusts of wind and storms could do harm in the same manner as earthquakes. Winthrop's conclusion was that the world was in "a MIX'D state, in which there is a variety of purposes, natural as well as moral," and that "there may be nothing, perhaps, in the material world, that is simply and absolutely evil...."[51]

Even Winthrop, then, agreed that natural events inescapably possessed a moral character. But many ministers went even further in describing the "mix'd" state of the world. They affirmed that natural phenomena were not only moral judgments themselves, but were also often associated with judgments meted out through the use of human instrumentalities. As John Danforth pointed out, "even when no great Desolations have been made" by earthquakes, they still acted as "awful Warnings, portenteous Signs, and Fore-runners of great State-quakes, and Church-quakes, and Desolations...." Paine pointed out that this had been the case with the tremors in New England around the time of the Pequot War; although they had not caused significant harm to the Indians, they still were a sign that part of Satan's heathen kingdom was falling.[52] Benjamin Colman applied the same lesson to his own times. Britain and her dominions seemed to be getting the

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[51]Winthrop, Lecture on Earthquakes, p. 31.

[52]John Danforth, A Sermon Occasioned by the late Great Earthquake (Boston, 1728), p. 2; Paine, Doctrine of Earthquakes, p. 65.

lion's share of earthquakes in recent years, and he worried that this might be an "omen" signalling trouble for the Protestant religion or perhaps a threat to civil liberties.[53]

In 1755, there were the same fears. Gilbert Tennent noted that "surprising Phenomina in the Firmament, the Air, or Earth, have been sometimes the Preludes of publick Calamities, or national Revolutions." He thought the late earthquakes, "extraordinary in respect of number and dreadful Effects," might be pointing to "some extraordinary Revolutions to be near at Hand!" Jonathan Parsons dilated on the earthquakes, as well as "those fearful sights, and great signs that have been in the heavens...in the sun, and in the moon," which were "solemn warnings of some great surprising event at the door."[54] And Jonathan Mayhew mentioned the same possibility to his own congregation.[55]

It may seem like splitting hairs to distinguish between the belief that earthquakes were themselves a divine judgment and the belief that they were also accompaniments to tumults in the political and religious world. But these are hairs particularly relevant to this investigation. Our first hypothetical reconstruction suggested that those who posited

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[53]Colman, Judgments of Providence, vii.

[54]Gilbert Tennent, The Good Man's Character and Reward Represented...together with Reflections on the Presage of Approaching Calamities (Philadelphia, 1756), p. 23; Jonathan Parsons, Good News from a Far Country (Portsmouth, 1756), p. 168.

[55]Mayhew, Discourse on Rev. XV:3-4, p. 69.

a naturally caused conflagration might come to the uneasy conclusion that the final catastrophe might not serve as a moral judgment after all. Since New Englanders saw earthquakes as naturally caused and nonetheless also as moral judgments, this hypothesis would seem unwarranted. But that would still leave the possibility suggested by the second reconstruction: that even though natural catastrophes were moral judgments, they were generally incompatible with God's preferred method of operation, which was through human instrumentalities. This hypothesis, however, is damaged by the prevailing assumption that natural signs and wonders often accompanied dramatic judgments God brought about by using men as the prime actors and movers. The combination was easy enough to make. For eighteenth century New Englanders, the natural and moral spheres were so well contempered with one another that it was not at all inappropriate to have a judgment accomplished by human instrumentalities accompanied by another one levied through natural means. If, as Benjamin Colman assumed, the British nation was becoming so sinful that God needed to warn its people of their degeneracy, why not have the country shaken by earthquakes at the same time as its civil liberties were being threatened by designing men?

III

Watching ministers interpret events instead of prophecies has provided some preliminary evidence about the workings of providence, but thus far, little about eschatology.

In what ways did ministers associate events predicted for the latter days with their own current catastrophes?

The obvious connection to be made was with the earthquakes predicted at the time of the conflagration, the resurrection of the witnesses and in general as signs of Christ's coming. While some of these passages had already been interpreted metaphorically by expositors, only one minister who discussed the prophecies and the earthquakes made a particular point of dissociating the current tremors from an eschatological context. John Barnard noted that when the Revelation predicted earthquakes, they generally stood for "great changes and Revolutions" and that "Thus also our Blessed Saviour seems to intend Metaphorical Earthquakes, when He mentions them as signs of His Coming...." Similarly, he assumed the earthquake signalling the rise of the witnesses was metaphorical, and concluded that "possibly whenever we read of Earthquakes in the Revelations, they intend Revolutions, and Changes, in the State, or in the Church."[56] But Barnard was an exception, and most ministers would have agreed with his friend Benjamin Colman that tremors acted as signs which accompanied political tumults rather than as mere metaphors of them. If there was any spot which surpassed Britain's proclivity for earthquakes, noted Colman, it was "Italy, that seat of sodomy.... And why may not its fall be by literal earthquakes and eruptions of sulphureous flames? The fiery

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[56]Barnard, Two Discourses, pp. 74-77.

hand of CHRIST shall effect this."[57]

Most ministers who discussed the eschatological implications of the earthquakes could agree on the basic point that literal convulsions would play some part in the latter days. But as usual, few divines were of one mind on the more specific details of how the end would come. We look in vain for a consensus that placed the conflagration before the millennium and assumed its imminence; or a disposition which allowed a violent, super-human providence to monopolize center stage. Instead, ministers' opinions covered a broad spectrum, ranging from the belief in the imminent end of the world to the calmer judgment that the conflagration remained on the far side of the thousand year reign.

As might be expected, the one divine who transformed his pronouncements on the earthquake into a veritable apocalyptic manifesto was the same man who hustled two sermons on the subject off to the press, one of them going through three editions in as many months. Cotton Mather had been convinced since 1716 that "all the Signs" of Christ's coming had been given, and that therefore, "it becomes us to look upon every Earthquake, as a Praemonition" of the day when antichrist would be destroyed. But he added (parting company with Colman), "what a CONFLAGRATION will be joined with it!" Whiston's calculations had ended the 1260 years of the Roman monarchy ten years earlier; for all Cotton knew, Christ's literal

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[57]Colman, Judgments of Providence, p. 28.

coming would be the next event. "I do not speak these things, as a Melancholy Visionary," he cried, but could not resist a shot at the "commonly Received Opinions" about Christ's coming, which seemed "as if on purpose" to keep the world in a profound sleep. "If I should make the Cry, FIRE, FIRE!...I should be as much mocked, and be as little minded, as Lot was in the Morning of the Day he went out of Sodom."[58] Mather may not have been a Melancholy Visionary, but he was the next best thing New England could get up on such short notice.

Cotton was right in at least one point: the majority of ministers could not accept his theory that the conflagration was imminent. But he did have at least one supporter whose views, though more moderate, reflected Mather's central concerns. Thomas Prince had become a firm friend of the older minister ("as Cordial and Constant...as any I have," wrote Cotton once) ever since the young man's return in 1721 from a stay in England.[59] The two often compared their readings of the prophecies, and although Prince did not follow Mather on every point, he shared a penchant for the dramatic.[60] In 1719 he began his publishing career with an improvement of

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[58]Cotton Mather, The Terror of the Lord (Boston, 1727), pp. 27-28; and Boanerges (Boston, 1727), pp. 44, 41.

[59]Mather, Diary, I, 337.

[60]Prince voiced one of his own particular conceits in a sermon on the downfall of antichrist. Samuel Sewall noted it, and remarked that the "One Fly...discovered in his Ointment" was the belief "that the 1000 years Rev. 20. stood for Three Hundred and Sixty Thousand years; taking every day of the 1000. years for a year." Sewall, Diary, III, 282.

the aurora borealis he and his friends had observed while in England. For a man steeped in the theories of Whiston and Burnet, it took little imagination to see that the smoky light was "in the shape of a Broad Sword," and its color "almost like Brimstone":

> We all began to think whether the SON of GOD was next to make His Glorious & Terrible Appearance, or the Conflagration of the World was now begun. For the Elements seem'd just as if they were melting with Fervent Heat, & the Aetherial Vault to be burning over us like the fierce Agitations of the Blaze in a Furnace, or at the Top of a Fiery Oven: & the Glimmering Light look'd as if it proceeded from a more Glorious Body behind that was approaching nearer & about to make its sudden Appearance to our Eyes.

This must have scared the hell out of them—or to use Prince's terminology, provided a providential sight designed "for a general Observation and Terrour."[61]

The same, of course, could be said of the 1727 earthquake, since Jesus had predicted "Famines, Pestilences, Troubles, Great Earthquakes in diverse Places, and fearful Sights and great Signs from Heaven" before his second coming, and "THEY are these PARTICULAR Earthquakes that we are now considering: of which there have been great Numbers...in these latter Ages." These were warnings enough to alert men to the near approach of the final convulsion, when Christ would also come "to set this lower World on Fire, to refine

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[61] Thomas Prince, An Account of a Strange Appearance (Boston, 1719), pp. 3-6, 11. Prince was criticized at the time for "supposing that dreadful things will follow [phenomena] such as Famine, Sword or Sickness." See Thomas Robie, A Letter to a Certain Gentleman (Boston, 1719), p. 8.

it, and to consume the Sinners out of it...."[62] Thirty years later when the tremors returned, Prince dusted off his sermon and sent it to the press along with his more recent effort, which was published separately. The latter repeated the warnings to watch for the unexpected fire ("how near we know not") and provided a description of the late earthquake's effects as edification for his readers:

> Upon the first Shock of the Earthquake, many Persons jump'd out of their Beds, and ran immediately into the Streets, while others sprung to the Windows, trembling, and seeing their Neighbours, as it were naked; shrieked with Apprehension of its being the Day of Judgment, and some tho't they heard the LAST TRUMP sounding, and cry'd out for Mercy.[63]

Prince's earthquake sermons did not discuss the details of his prophetic views, but these can be discovered in William Torrey's Brief Discourse Concerning Futurities, a tract Prince arranged to have published in 1757. Torrey had written the piece seventy years earlier, his son Samuel had been a good friend of the Prince family, and now it was published not merely out of filial piety, but because Prince agreed with its thesis (except for a few minor details about Gog and Magog). Torrey generally culled his points out of Joseph Mede: Christ's coming would be "personal, visible and glorious"; it would precede the millennium, as would the conflagration; and the first resurrection of saints was to be a

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[62] Thomas Prince, Earthquakes the Works of God (Boston, 1727), pp. 6, 44.

[63] Thomas Prince, An Improvement of the Doctrine of Earthquakes (Boston, 1755), pp. 41, 16.

literal one, following by a paradise state where lions would actually lie down with lambs.[64]

Several other earthquake sermons demonstrated that Mede's influence remained considerable even in the 1750's. John Burt and John Rogers, two Old Lights, noted that the "universal Earthquake" at Christ's second coming would be preceded by littler ones. Although neither man discussed his views at great length, Burt associated the last convulsion with the fall of antichrist, putting the conflagration and second coming before the thousand year reign; and Rogers noted that at the time of the fire, true believers would have "a Part in the First Resurrection."[65] Mather Byles was more explicit, and his rhetoric similar to the kind used by his namesake. He envisioned the righteous being caught up in the air to avoid being burned, and looking down on the desolations below. He concluded that the day was near ("it hasteth

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[64]William Torrey, A Brief Discourse Concerning Futurities (Boston, 1755), pp. 9, 23-30, 38-41, and passim. For reasons which remain unclear, Heimert calls Torrey's tract "essentially postmillennial," though he says Prince corrected Torrey's implicitly literal reading of the earthquakes (Heimert, Religion and the American Mind, p. 75). In fact, though both men were in effect pre-millennialists, Prince never corrected Torrey on this score, and interpreted scriptural earthquakes literally, while Torrey (following Mede) explicitly said they represented "Distress of Nations" (p. 19). Another prophetic tract by an old New England worthy (Ezekiel Cheever, schoolmaster to Samuel Sewall among others) was published the same year, and reflected the same views. Perhaps Prince sponsored it, although there is no evidence of this. See Ezekiel Cheever, Scripture Prophecies Explained (Boston, 1757), pp. 7-11.

[65]Burt's reliance on Mede's scenario can be seen from his association of Isaiah 24:17-19 with Revelation 16:15-19. John Burt, Earthquakes, the Effects of God's Wrath (Newport, 1755), pp. 4-5, 17; John Rogers, Three Sermons (Boston, 1756), pp. 60-61.

quickly") and called on saints to pray for its speedy arrival. Perhaps to quicken their thoughts in this direction, he issued a poem the same year entitled "The Conflagration."[66]

It would seem natural that those who followed Mede would be likely to use their earthquake sermons as a platform for matters eschatological, since he put the conflagration and its attendant concussions ahead of the thousand years. But divines like Joseph Sewall and Benjamin Colman, who both accepted a post-millennial conflagration, also discussed the eschatological overtones of the earthquakes.[67] And perhaps the most interesting examples of similar opinions were to be found in the sermons of two prominent liberals: Charles Chauncy and Jonathan Mayhew.

Chauncy's earthquake sermon included the unremarkable assertion that the tremor was "a lively emblem" of the approaching "awful day of God," when the heavens would melt and the earth pass away; but The Earth Delivered from the Curse, a sermon he preached only a few months later, showed that his interpretation of the final days was quite unusual. The curse, of course, was the one God had uttered upon sending Adam from the garden of Eden, and it had made the earth a much less hospitable place. Chauncy was familiar with Thomas Burnet's writings, and his description of the changes in the

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[66] Mather Byles, Divine Power and Anger Displayed in Earthquakes (Boston, 1755), pp. 25-30; Poems. The Conflagration (Boston, 1755), pp. 4-5.

[67] Sewall's views will be discussed later in the chapter.

earth reflected a similar concern with the physical consequences of the fall: the seasons were more extreme now, the earth less fruitful, the air less pure (which, according to Chauncy, encouraged the growth of thorns!). The removal of this curse would come, as it had with Burnet, only through the dissolution of the world by fire. But here he parted company. "Some have tho't, that these new heavens and earth will be formed before the general resurrection and judgment; but 'tis with me beyond all doubt, that they are herein mistaken."[68]

That short statement alone indicated how far Chauncy had departed from established millennial theories. By putting the new heavens and earth after the last judgment, it seemed as if he were rejecting a post-millennial eschatology. But nowhere in the sermon did Chauncy discuss post-millennial theories in the first place; and more significantly, his view also conflicted with Mede's interpretation of a first resurrection and millennium before the final judgment of the wicked. Chauncy's reasons for differing were scriptural. Peter's classic passage describing the conflagration as the passing away of the earth and heavens was also "spoken of by the Apostle John" in the twenty-first chapter of the Revelation, where "the first heaven and the first earth passed away." But chapter twenty had already described the dead coming forth to be judged "before [John] saw the erection of a new

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[68]Charles Chauncy, The Earth delivered from the Curse (Boston, 1756), p. 9. Chauncy cites Burnet, p. 14.

earth and heavens." Thus Chauncy made the astonishing conclusion that the new heavens and new earth referred not to a millennial world but to the traditional heavenly paradise. And furthermore, "this world of ours...the very world we now live in, thus changed and made new, is the place, where good men, after the resurrection, and judgment, shall live and reign with Christ forever and ever."[69] In this conclusion he was influenced by an English nonconformist, Joseph Hallet, who had pointed out that contrary to popular belief, the Bible used the word "heaven" to refer only to where God had his throne, not to where good men would live after the resurrection. And if that was the case, only the stars, moons, suns, comets and this or other earths could be the final resting place. "Neither of these, except the earths," concluded Hallet, "can be tho't fit to be the habitation of good men in the future state.... Why then should we seek for another unknown place, of which the scripture never speaks?"[70]

So Chauncy also most certainly rejected what most historians have called the traditional pre-millennial view. He did not even mention the millennium, and instead concentrated on the delights of heaven. But the scriptural evidence he used provides a clue to his chronology. For him, chapters twenty and twenty-one of the Revelation followed each other in time, and hence the description of the thousand year reign

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[69] Ibid., pp. 14-15.

[70] Joseph Hallet, A Free Impartial Study...being Notes on Some Peculiar Texts (3 vols.; London, 1726-36), I, 198; quoted in Chauncy, Earth delivered, p. 15n.

in chapter twenty was not the same as the new heavens and new earth described in chapter twenty-one. Mede, Burnet, Whiston and the Mathers, on the other hand, had all seen these two descriptions as synchronous, with chapter twenty-one as merely an elaboration of what the thousand year reign would be like. The only logical conclusion to be made is that Chauncy followed the tradition of men like Willard, who put the millennium before the conflagration and general resurrection, interpreting the first resurrection and subsequent thousand years in a metaphorical sense. Strictly speaking then, Charles Chauncy was a post-millennialist: he believed Christ's literal coming followed the thousand year reign mentioned in Revelation 20.

Jonathan Mayhew too was unorthodox in his eschatology. In a sermon delivered five days after the earthquake, he preached on the Expected Dissolution of All Things, and explained to his audience that the conflagration would come when fires inside the earth, gradually growing in strength, burst out upon the land. But Mayhew was unwilling to limit the destruction to the earth alone, because "for anything we know to the contrary, or have reason to think, there may be more wicked Worlds than one, which shall, at this period, undergo the same fiery doom and dissolution...." In fact, scripture itself hinted that the solar system rather than the earth alone might be destroyed: how else could the predictions of the moon's darkening and sun's not giving light be taken? And Peter had said that the faithful should look for

a new heavens as well as a new earth.[71] All this was contrary to the accepted opinion formulated by Mede, who had distinguished between three linguistic uses of the word "heaven," concluding that in the case of the conflagration, only the "sublunary" atmosphere had been meant.[72]

But when was all this coming? Mayhew claimed no "human arithmetic" could divine the final hour, but scriptures had said the fire would coincide with Christ's literal coming, which would be ushered in by some "astonishing tokens." The thirteenth chapter of Mark had described them, but ministers disagreed on their interpretation, Mayhew noted. Earthquakes had been mentioned there, but since they were "common at other times, and in all ages," they could not be considered as a reliable sign. And then there was the question of which coming was meant. Mayhew knew that "some interpret what is said in this chapter [i.e., Mark 13] concerning the coming of our Lord, of a figurative, and less proper coming, viz. as he came to destroy Jerusalem, with the whole Jewish polity." But Mayhew could not agree. "It has evidently a farther view," he concluded, looking forward to the time when Christ "shall literally descend from heaven" to pass the final judgment sentence. Historians have sometimes read this passage as a rejection of the post-millennial notion that Christ came to inaugurate the thousand years only figuratively. In fact,

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[71] Jonathan Mayhew, Expected Dissolution of All Things (Boston, 1755), pp. 33, 19-20.

[72] Mede, Works, pp. 614-15.

Mayhew never rejected the figurative coming, but only argued that Mark 13 referred to the literal one, at the general resurrection: "indeed, there are some things in this discourse which cannot possibly be referred to that figurative coming of Christ before mentioned; but only to the time of his coming to judge the quick and the dead...."[73]

Mayhew made one more significant conjecture. Scripture indicated "not only that the future conflagration and last judgment will be contemporary" but also—clean contrary to Charles Chauncy's hopes—that the earth would be "thus reserved unto fire, partly, at least, for the place and scene of that punishment and perdition, which awaits the wicked." Linguistic arguments about the meaning of heaven evidently did not move him, for he envisioned one "far above the stars" which would become the final residence of the saints, "to which no flames can ascend...."[74] But if Mayhew's deductions caused him to disagree with Chauncy on this point, they also

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[73]Mayhew, Expected Dissolution, p. 30. This passage is a confusing one. When Mayhew speaks of "that figurative coming of Christ," he may be referring to the millennial period, since the meaning of Christ's coming into his kingdom could be ambiguous, and the millennial period was often seen as the greatest part of that coming which had been going on throughout history. But possibly, Mayhew was referring to one specific part of that more general figurative coming, the destruction of the Jewish temple in 77 A.D. John Lightfoot, an English commentator, had claimed this desolation fulfilled scriptural passages which most expositors thought pointed to the conflagration, and Mayhew may have been denying Lightfoot's limited meaning. But even if that was the case, Mayhew still put the millennium before Christ's literal coming, as we shall see.

[74]Ibid., pp. 24, 32.

led him to settle on a post-millennial chronology. Since the last judgment came at the same time as the fire, and that same fire was to continue on earth as the "everlasting fire" of hell, the thousand years of peace on earth had to occur before the final catastrophe.

Mayhew was quite diffident about fixing a date for this holocaust, but since he thought at least a thousand years of bliss would intervene, he was naturally inclined to think the dissolution was "still very remote in futurity."[75] In a second sermon improving the earthquake, he noted the "chief articles" yet to be accomplished. Babylon would have to be "utterly destroyed; which surely, will be a great work, whenever it is accomplished"; the Jews would be converted and gathered from their wide dispersions; and the heathen Gentiles would finally see the light, making the whole world but "'one fold and one shepherd': [when] 'every tonge shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord...."[76] Of course, Christ had warned that his second coming would be like a thief in the night, and Mayhew hastened to say that he might be mistaken in his opinion. Yet he insisted that the certainty of that coming rather than its nearness was what believers ought to remember most. In what may well have been a jab at Thomas Prince's less cautious rhetoric, he concluded that it would be "impious pretence" to "designedly impose upon and terrify

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[75] Ibid., p. 39.

[76] Mayhew, A Discourse on Rev. XV:3-4, p. 20.

men, by representing the time when [the dissolution] shall come to pass, as being either certainly, or even probably, very near at hand."[77]

Thus the prophetic opinions found in earthquake sermons ranged all the way from Cotton Mather's and Thomas Prince's dramatic use of Mede to Charles Chauncy's and Jonathan Mayhew's restrained postponements of the conflagration. The ministers who used eschatology to improve catastrophe were not limited to one particular version of the last days, let alone a belief in the imminence of the dissolution. Yet for all the specific disagreements, there were a number of general themes which characterized the prophetic discussions; themes which are at first confusing because they appear to contradict each other.

One of these was the rather gloomy conclusion that even if the conflagration was not imminent, the world was steadily declining, both physically and morally. The earthquakes, of course, were the symbol of the natural decay; as Prince had pointed out, their increasing frequency in recent years comported with the Biblical predictions of the latter days. And in 1727, other divines were willing to agree. John Fox peppered his congregation at Woburn with a series of questions calculated to make his own feelings plain: "Have there not been many Earthquakes in these latter Times? whereby these Predictions seem to be fulfilling apace?" And what

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[77]Mayhew, Expected Dissolution, p. 37. For a further examination of Mayhew's eschatology, see below, Chapter 5.

about all the volcanic eruptions—did they not "Presage, and Forebode the near Approach, of that Universal Conflagration, which shall bring on its Final Dissolution? Oh, have we not reason to conclude the habitable World in which we dwell is hastning on amain to its Dissolution?" Fox did realize that the Revelation's mention of the earthquake dividing Babylon was surely meant metaphorically, but he could not resist adding "(and that perhaps) not only metaphorically, but literally."[78] Similarly, John Cotton (grandson of his famous namesake) described a "carnally secure and stupid" world which was meant to serve as a sign reminding watchful believers that Christ might any day "personally and visibly descend with a glorious retinue of Holy Angels."[79] And Nathaniel Morrill, of Rye, New Hampshire, began his sermon by pointing out the supposed rash of recent earthquakes as undoubted "forerunners of doleful and calamitous Days" which preceded the destruction of the wicked.[80]

Similar conclusions were reached in 1755. Thomas Foxcroft noted that earthquakes were generally "a rare thing" when compared with some of God's other natural judgments; but admitted that scripture suggested they would perhaps "become more and more common in this last Age of the World." Foxcroft

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[78]John Fox, God by his Power causes the Earth and its Inhabitants to Tremble (Boston, 1728), pp. 10-11, 25.

[79]John Cotton, A Holy Fear of God (Boston, 1727), v-vi.

[80]Nathaniel Morrill, The Lord's Voice (Boston, 1728), p. 2.

biblically observed that the earth waxed old as doth a garment, "and an old Garment easily admits of Rents." But he also measured the earth's age in a moral sense: "As the World grows old in Sin, and the final Dissolution approaches nearer, we may reasonably expect a greater Frequency of this Divine Judgment."[81] Thomas Prentice used the traditional rhetorical question to make the same point: when earthquakes become "in a Manner universal, they are to be regarded as Prognosticks and Forerunners of the Destruction of the whole World. And have not these Judgments of Earthquakes, desolating Storms, Inundations, &c. been unusually prevalent in the World, of later Times?" Like Foxcroft, he saw earthquakes as symbolic of the world's decay both "in a moral and natural Sense; and of its drawing towards its Dissolution."[82]

These sentiments seem to indicate what we might have expected all along: that the catastrophic interpretation encouraged by earthquakes led to the pessimistic belief that the world was marching steadily downhill towards its violent and sinful end. The conclusion seems inescapable, given the evidence; and yet, a second search through the sermons would reveal a different set of opinions. Hopes for a spreading and universal revival sometimes stood side by side with the more pessimistic prognostics.

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[81] Thomas Foxcroft, The Earthquake, a Divine Visitation (Boston, 1756), pp. 32, 42.

[82] Thomas Prentice, Observations Moral and Religious, on the late terrible Night of the Earthquake (Boston, 1756), p. 11.

Thomas Prentice, for instance, thought that the last great earthquake would tear Babylon apart; but he hardly assumed that the world, or even the Roman Catholic part of it, was necessarily condemned to a catastrophic finish. He hoped God would bring on "a glorious Reformation in that most corrupt, most idolatrous, most cruel, and bloody Church." Prentice never specifically equated this far reaching reformation with the millennium (it might have been, as with Whiston and Burnet, an indication of the witnesses' resurrection); but his version of the dissolution apparently included judgment of the damned as well as the saved, which pointed towards a post-millennial conflagration.[83] As we have seen, Mather Byles would have disagreed on this last point; but even so, his hopes apparently outran his logic: "How happy would it be," he exclaimed, "if this awful Providence should be blessed by God to the producing a universal Reformation and a Revival of Religion among us!"[84]

The same unusual combinations were present in the 1727 sermons. Joseph Sewall noted, as many had, that the earthquakes were signs of Christ's coming and that since no one could be sure of the hour everyone should have their lamps trimmed and ready. But he also used imagery reminiscent of

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[83] Ibid., pp. 21-23.

[84] Byles, Divine Power, p. 22. Note also that Foxcroft, despite all his sentiments about the decaying moral world, still hoped that God would pour out his spirit on New England in order that "'Glory [might] dwell in our Land.'" Foxcroft, The Earthquake, p. 50.

Samuel Willard's prophetic tract. There was a day near, he predicted, when Christ the Fountain would be

> opened in the extensive Preaching of the Gospel, and the abundant Effusions of the Spirit of Grace, so that many Nations shall be sprinkled, yea washed from their Sins, when all Israel shall be saved; and the receiving of them shall be Life from the Dead to the Gentiles!

After all, if the prophecies promised widespread conversions among the Jews, why might not New England hope for a similar dispensation?[85]

That year at Haverhill, Massachusetts, John Brown was beginning to think the dispensation might well be on its way. In the month after the earthquake he had admitted 154 persons into the church, 87 of them to the Lord's Supper. "It has looked in short, as if we were going into a New World," he wrote to a friend; "which things have occasion'd in me various thoughts—and been as surprising as the EARTHQUAKES." Brown began to delve through his church records, and found that of the 109 people who had owned the covenant since the beginning of his ministry in 1719, 54 had done it since the previous May. And of the 130 people admitted to the Lord's

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[85] Joseph Sewall, The Duty of a People (Boston, 1727), p. 22; Repentance—The sure Way to Escape Destruction (Boston, 1727), pp. 30, 40. Sewall, it will be remembered, opposed Cotton Mather's excited pronouncements of 1716 (see above, Chapter 2); and that attitude apparently persisted. Mather at one time considered inviting him to the sessions he had with Thomas Prince on the prophecies, but noted that Sewall might have "a Less Degree of Relish for those things, not easy to be accounted for" (Mather, Diary, II, 685). Sewall's earthquake sermon likewise remained quite moderate in rhetoric when compared with Mather's or even Prince's productions.

Supper, 30 had been in the last year—three times as many as any year save his first. "I need not make any reflections to you, on these things," he concluded; "I want very much to hear what awful effects the awful visitation has had near, and about you, and what are the thoughts of the most Judicious about the Signs of the Times."[86] Brown's hopeful conjectures were published by his friend John Cotton—the same John Cotton who warned in his own earthquake sermon of a "carnally secure and stupid" world which would be awaiting Christ when he made his descent "personally and visibly... with a glorious retinue of Holy Angels."[87]

This contradictory evidence makes it more difficult to assess the role catastrophe played in prophetic thought. It would be easy enough to explain the pessimism of a world hastening on amain towards its dissolution; or simple enough to account for the optimism of a world gradually reforming itself into a land of milk and honey. But how do we explain a world that seems to be doing its best at going in both directions at the same time?

IV

One possible answer might be that New Englanders retained their optimism in an attempt to make the best out of a difficult situation; and in one sense that was quite correct.

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[86] Appendix (separately paginated), in Cotton, A Holy Fear of God, pp. 5-6, 7.

[87] Cotton, A Holy Fear of God, v-vi.

The Revelation itself was in effect an attempt of that sort, written to account for the afflictive catastrophes that God had sent in the guise of Roman emperors. Early Christians were faced with the simple but distressing fact that Christ had not come and that Romans were hounding them wherever they went. God must have permitted these evil things; ergo John's comforting explanation that the suffering was part of the divine plan, and God's ordained way of bringing about deliverance.

For similar reasons, the ministers who sought the meaning of history in 1727 and 1755 could not ignore the earthquakes. As long as God's moral government included the natural sphere, catastrophes perforce had to be—and were—interpreted as significant parts of the over-all plan. Even Jonathan Edwards, the model post-millennialist, drew no hard line between natural and supernatural or non-catastrophic and catastrophic means of fulfilling God's plan. The British triumph at Cape Breton, brought about in part by a violent storm, seemed to him "almost miraculous"; recent providences came, "perhaps, the nearest to a parallel, with God's wonderful works of old, in Moses, Joshua's, and Hezekiah's time." Similarly, he regarded the earthquake at Lima as part of God's pouring of the vials on antichrist.[88] And when he composed a list of current events pointing to the fulfillment of the sixth vial, natural calamities were easily mixed in with

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[88] Dwight, ed., Works, I, 140.

humanly instigated setbacks: French sailors had started a mutiny in Toulouse; a famine around Bordeaux killed 10,000; the English took Pondichery; Nantes was desolated by a violent hurricane.[89] And so on. How else could one interpret such disasters?

Yet this does not put the point strongly enough. It merely assumes that given the presupposition of an all-powerful God who superintended the moral and natural government of the world, the theologians were presented with a fait accompli by the earthquakes of 1727 and 1755. Or that in crude terms, their moral system was threatened unless they read the earthquakes as threats from an angry God: believe or else. Certainly this element was present in many sermons. At such times, "God stands at the door," said Eliphalet Williams:

> The Clouds gather, and thicken, look black, and lowring, seem charged with Thunder, or big with Storm and Tempest; GOD hangs out (as it were) His red, His bloody Flag, brandishes his flaming Sword in the Skies, or ariseth out of His Place, and shakes terribly the Earth, and loudly Warns a degenerate World of impending Evils.[90]

But this hardly tells all of the story: calamity was not merely appropriated to the Apocalypse by the exigencies of an often violent world. A more subtle theodicy yoked misfortune with salvation not as mere necessity but as virtue. God, after all, used catastrophes for two purposes. Most obviously,

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[89] Stein, "Notes," II, 321-79.

[90] Eliphalet Williams, The Duty of a People under dark Providences (New London, 1756), p. 14.

they could be instruments of chastisement which led to destruction. But calamities also served "to Reclaim sinful People, and bring them to Repentance."[91] Mather expressed the notion with his usual extravagance: "O Wonderful! O Wonderful! Our GOD, instead of sending Earthquakes to destroy us as He justly might, He sends them to fetch us home into Himself, and to do us the greatest Good in the World!" In that sense, the afflictions were actually an example of God's kindness, and proof that "Many (very many) of the divine Judgments may justly be called Mercies."[92]

Thus the earthquake sermons reflected the same combination of gloom and hope found in apocalyptic literature. While divine anger was a terrible thing, Thomas Paine pointed out that as with all other judgments, the tremors were "sanctified to the Elect, and made the Instruments of their spiritual Good."[93] Joseph Sewall and Charles Chauncy both used the common analogy of gold purified by fire to explain how calamities worked to the benefit of sinful saints.[94] Others noted that God made sure he combined events of judgment with those of mercy, and the 1727 sermons repeated a litany of

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[91] Ibid.

[92] Cotton Mather, Boanerges, p. 38; John Rogers, Three Sermons, p. 53.

[93] Paine, Doctrine of Earthquakes, p. 38. See also Nathaniel Gookin, Day of Trouble Near (Boston, 1728), p. 47; and Joseph Sewall, Repentance, p. 26.

[94] Chauncy, Earth Delivered from the Curse, p. 28; Joseph Sewall, Repentance, p. 36.

these combinations: King George was dead, but his son reigned; great sickness had threatened, but general health prevailed; Indians almost went to war, but peace remained; great heat and drought had marred the summer weather, but New England still reaped a good harvest; thunder, lightning and earthquakes had shocked the land, yet no lives were lost.[95] With this perspective in mind, Prince could easily explain to his listeners that a Biblical text illustrating God's wrath was not at all inappropriate for a Thanksgiving sermon, since "it becomes us to sing of both Judgment and Mercy, to rejoice with Trembling...."[96]

Super-human catastrophes were thus an important part of the prophetic outlook; but it would be misleading to argue that by removing them from the apocalyptic scenario, we could successfully purge the prophetic viewpoint of its darker components. It was the concept of judgment, not catastrophe, that was the heart of the rationale which embraced afflictions as a part of the latter days. And so long as New Englanders regarded judgment as an inseparable part of salvation, they would continue to combine hopeful rhetoric with the gloom of both natural and moral calamities. The earthquakes did nothing to discourage them from adopting this viewpoint; and neither did the Revelation's long description

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[95]Samuel Phillips, Three Plain Practical Discourses (Boston, 1728), pp. 51-54. The same list can be found in Joseph Sewall, Repentance, p. 26, and William Williams, Divine Warnings (Boston, 1728), pp. 31-34.

[96]Prince, Earthquakes the Works of God, p. 20.

of sufferings which the saints were forced to undergo before the final deliverance.

Yet after all this, it might be argued that we have loaded the deck in using earthquake sermons as evidence for our experiment of watching ministers interpret events instead of prophecies. Between the rumblings of 1727 and 1755 lay a much greater spiritual tremor: the Great Awakening. The historical optimism historians have painted as arising out of this "anticipation of the latter day glory" stands in strange contrast with the gloom-tinged hopes which the last two chapters have insisted was an integral part of the apocalyptic view of history. Jonathan Edwards optimistically believed that the witnesses of the Revelation had already been slain; how can this be reconciled with the pronouncements of 1727 and 1755? When the shocks of the earthquakes were still firm in everyone's memories, Joseph Sewall had put the situation in historical perspective by noting that "the Church flourished like the Palm-tree, under her pressures, of which it is observed, 'the more it is press'd down, the more it grows.'"[97] What happened when the pressures of declension, deadness and calamity ceased? Did the enthusiasm of the Awakening promote a drift away from the traditional apocalyptic outlook, or did it only confirm the almost paradoxical model of historical progress and redemption through affliction?

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[97]Joseph Sewall, Repentance, p. 36.

Chapter 4

CONVERSION

For any historian whose province is maintaining the New England trails running from 1700 to 1800, the Great Awakening is somewhat of an embarrassment: a giant boulder unceremoniously dropped in the middle of historical pathways which would be much more comfortably traversed had there been no boulder at all. But for better or worse, the boulder is there. The only question is, how do we traverse it?

At first glance, the most obvious approach for anyone interested in millennial thought would seem to be an emphasis on the Great side of the Great Awakening. For Awakenings themselves were not new to New England. The earlier revivals of Solomon Stoddard in Northampton are the most well known, but other towns had received similar tokens of God's favor.[1] The Great Awakening could be styled Great because it was amazingly widespread. God's spirit seemed to be breaking out not merely in isolated communities, but all across New England, the American colonies, even England and Scotland. It was this magnitude that prompted participants to draw the parallels between the revival and the Biblical promises of "the spirit poured out on all flesh" in the latter days of

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[1] Edwin S. Gaustad, The Great Awakening in New England (New York, 1957), Chapter 2.

the world.

From the very beginning, promoters of the work on both sides of the Atlantic were hopeful about the revival's potential. Isaac Watts and John Guyse of London both eagerly received news of Edwards' initial successes of 1735 (though they discreetly inquired for more information on the character of this frontier minister).[2] Their preface to his Faithful Narrative called for prayers encouraging "the accomplishment of all [God's] words of grace which are written in the Old Testament, and in the New, concerning the large extent of this salvation in the latter days of the world." At the same time, Edwards impressed upon his congregation the international import of their own spiritual travails. "When I first heard of the notice the Rev. Dr. Watts and Dr. Guyse took of God's mercies to us," he wrote, "I took occasion to inform our congregation of it in a discourse from these words, 'A city that is set upon a hill cannot be hid'.... The congregation were very sensibly moved and affected...."[3] When the flood began in earnest, William Cooper of Boston thought the Faithful Narrative was precisely the kind of account which would help spread news of the expanding work. Accordingly, his preface to Edwards' newest work, Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God, asked ministers to send accounts

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[2]C. C. Goen, ed., The Great Awakening, Vol. IV of The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Perry Miller and John Smith, gen. eds. (4 vols.; New Haven, 1958-), pp. 39-40 (hereafter cited as Yale Works).

[3]Ibid., pp. 137, 210.

of their own revivals to Edwards for publication, "so the world may know this surprising dispensation, in the beginning, progress and various circumstances of it." Edwards liked the idea, but suggested that the compilation could best be handled by one of the ministers at Boston, where news was more readily obtainable and the presses right at hand.[4]

The task fell, at least nominally, to Thomas Prince, Jr., who undoubtedly had the benefit of his father's watchful eye. The Christian History began publication in 1744, and was issued weekly for the next two years. Although it concentrated on accounts of the New England revivals, it borrowed a good deal of material from similar papers published in Britain. In London, there was the Weekly History of the Progress of the Gospel as well as less frequently issued pamphlets like An Account of the most remarkable Particulars relating to the present Progress of the Gospel. Glasgow had its own Weekly History. All of these publications emphasized and promoted the widespread nature of the Awakening, haphazard as their editing jobs may have been. The isolated minister, writing of the good news in his own country parish, would see next to his own account the similarly enthusiastic reports of others. It is here in The Christian History—where the Awakenings were made Great—that we would expect to find the larger millennial vision informing the spirit of the revivals.

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[4] Ibid., pp. 224, 259.

And we do find it. It appears most often as a fitting rhetorical close to letters bringing news of the gospel's further success. Often, writers would borrow the ecstatic conclusion from the Revelation itself. Thus William Tennent concluded the revivals were "only an Earnest of much greater blessings to his Church.... I doubt not but the Light of the Gospel-Sun shall yet increase as the Light of seven Days.... Even so come LORD JESUS, come quickly!" John Cotton, at Halifax, prayed that God would "yet again revive his Work among us.... May he go on conquering and to conquer, till he has subdued the land."[5] From Georgia, William Grant expressed the same sentiments in Matherian cadences ("Oh! that all the Kingdoms of the Earth may be come the Kingdoms of our LORD JESUS CHRIST!"). John Willison of Dundee, who wrote a preface to the Scottish edition of Edwards' Distinguishing Marks, called on God to "hasten the Glory of the latter Days, when the Jews shall be brought in with the Fulness of the Gentile." There were Gospel successes in Rotterdam, glowing reports from far flung missionaries; Prince Jr. passed them all along to New Englanders, with the hope that the spirit would spread to "the Aboriginals at Bengal, Cormandel, Malabar, and the Islands of Ceylon, and Batavia in the East Indies" until the REDEEMER's conquest becomes compleat."[6]

The temptation, of course, was to identify the late

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[5]Thomas Prince, Jr., ed., The Christian History (2 vols.; Boston, 1744-45), II, 310; I, 268, 365.

[6]Ibid., I, 365, 85, 287; II, 28-29.

spiritual outbursts with the beginning of the final descent of the Holy Spirit. "What shall be the Issue of so great and glorious Appearance one may not be safe in determining," cautioned John Syms in England. But his enthusiasm overruled his own advice: "surely it has much of the Appearance of the Glory of the latter Days, when it is said, the Glory of the LORD shall cover the earth as the Waters the Sea.... Even so come LORD JESUS, come quickly, Amen, Halleluia!"[7] Most people were more cautious and referred to the awakenings as "Earnests" or "Foretastes" of even greater effusions. Edwards, for one, appreciated the need for prudence, since he had already found himself "slanderously" accused of claiming that the millennium had begun in Northampton. The accusation was of course false, but he did believe that the revivals were "forerunners of those glorious times so often prophesied of in the Scriptures...."[8] And that was the official position adopted by the ministers who gathered at Boston in 1743 to support the Awakening. The "Testimony and Advice" of the divines contained the usual talk of "Earnests" and the usual concluding litany: "AMEN! Even so come LORD JESUS; come Quickly!"[9]

No doubt, then, the impact of the widespread revivals fostered a hopeful and expectant view of the future. Yet the

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[7] Ibid., II, 102.

[8] Dwight, ed., Works, I, 213.

[9] Prince Jr., ed., Christian History, I, 158, 162.

letters and histories in Prince's magazine suggest—both by what they contain and what they do not—that supporters of the Awakening retained much of the paradoxical rhetoric found in earlier versions of New England eschatology.

To begin with, there was a good deal of talk about waiting for Christ's coming. As usual, historians have the difficult job of deciding whether to take these statements literally. The ministers of Fairfield, Connecticut, for instance, believed that maintaining the present work "would give an hopeful Prospect of the LORD's Return, and so of the Revival of Religion from its present declining State."[10] Did they mean that Christ must literally arrive before any real improvement in religion could take place? (Even with the revivals, religion seemed to be in a "declining state.") Or did they mean that Christ's coming was a metaphorical entering into his kingdom ("and so" nothing more than a further "Revival of Religion from its present declining State")? Both interpretations, as we have seen, were viable ones held by respected New Englanders before the Awakening.

Even more confusing, some writers seemed to talk in an optimistic way while still using imagery associated with Christ's sudden coming to a world asleep in sin. The Christian History printed a letter from one J----n O----n, a country minister in England, who carried on in the usual way about the spread of holy knowledge in the latter days. At

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[10] Ibid., II, 312.

the same time, the two metaphors he chose were images with a different import. The first was Christ's parable of the sower, where the recent gospel successes were likened to the seed sown in rocky ground, which sprang up quickly, but soon withered. What followed was the seed sown among thorns. "Indeed this appears to be Satan's Hour, and the Power of Darkness; he seems to have got the Church like Peter, into the Sieve of Temptation...." Only after all that would the seed take root in good ground. The second image was drawn from the parable of the slumbering virgins who were found unprepared at the coming of the bridegroom. This was the sort of rhetoric Cotton Mather delighted in using to warn the world of Christ's unexpected coming. Yet in this case, the image is used in a confusing way, the conclusion being that the "Night of [the virgins'] Slumber is far spent, and the Day is at Hand...."[11]

The experiences William Shurtleff reported at Portsmouth, New Hampshire, appear even less consonant with the optimism of the awakenings. Shurtleff noted that the outcries of afflicted sinners in his congregation were so great that others there were reminded of the scene at Christ's coming. This thought led him to mention another recent instance when a chimney catching fire had made everyone think of the same event, "Which being believ'd by a great many, some that were not before so much affected as others, were put into deepest

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[11] Ibid., pp. 47-51.

Distress, and great Numbers had their Convictions hereby strengthened and confirmed." Shurtleff knew what kind of reception his story was likely to have from "a great many of the Humourists of the Age," and suggested that they would do better to think a little more seriously about the day of judgment coming.[12] For him, at least, the optimism of a spreading revival was not inconsistent with thought about the approaching conflagration.

The inclusion of such letters in The Christian History makes it more difficult to assess the role of millennial thought in the Awakening; but what is perhaps more puzzling is the material which was not inserted in the compendium. Although letters were full of general rhetoric about the hopes of the latter days, virtually no one bothered to provide interested Christians with more specific discussions about how many vials had been poured out and how much time remained before the fall of antichrist. The one letter which examined the prophecies in any detail came from a Scottish minister, William McCulloch, who had been corresponding with Edwards on the subject. McCulloch noted Isaiah's prediction that men would one day "fear the name of the LORD from the west." Might not that indicate that the Gospel would be spread from West to east, rather than the other way around, as many interpreters had predicted? The revivals in New England in 1735 and 1740-42 preceded those in Scotland in 1742-

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[12] Ibid., I, 384.

43, and "something vastly greater" was likely to follow. In this matter he openly declared his agreement with similar optimistic observations Edwards had made in his Thoughts on the Revival. But he felt constrained to disagree on one point: "I'm afraid (which is a Thing you do not hint at) that before these glorious Times, some dreadful Stroke or Trial may be yet abiding us. May the LORD prepare us for it. But as to this, I cannot and dare not peremptorily determine."[13]

Aside from this gloomy forecast, The Christian History is strangely devoid of prophetical speculations. If any were anxious, as John Brown had been after the 1727 earthquake, to learn "what are the thoughts of the most Judicious about the Signs of the Times," they seem not to have inquired to Prince for the answer.[14] And if the widespread successes of the Awakening had convinced many to change their opinion of when the conflagration was coming, or whether the witnesses had yet been slain, they apparently did not consider the magazine an appropriate place to announce their change of heart.

Perhaps, then, we ought to conclude that The Christian History failed in its attempt to make the Awakening Great; failed, at least, to make explicit and well-defined connections between the revivals and the larger work of redemption described in the Revelation. Instead (perhaps because of the weak editorial direction) the magazine was left with the de-

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[13] Ibid., p. 363.

[14] Cotton, A Holy Fear of God, Appendix.

tails of the inevitably provincial accounts sent in by excited ministers scattered throughout the country. It printed descriptions of striking individual conversions; featured tales of pastors deluged by requests for counselling; provided narratives of what other divines had done when people in their congregations had burst out groaning under conviction. Despite the prophetic trimmings, most of the letters to The Christian History dealt, in effect, not with the Great Awakening but with the personal struggles of individuals' Small Awakenings. And if that is the case, perhaps we would be better off if we left the daily minutiae of The Christian History behind and searched elsewhere for more explicitly prophetic discussions of the Awakening.

But I would like to suggest another approach. If the Princes did not succeed in articulately connecting the Great Awakening with the small, in integrating the revivals with the larger work of Redemption, it was not for lack of good intentions. For them, as for all New Lights, each individual conversion was an integral part of the larger Awakening. The pattern behind the grand history of the Revelation, when examined more closely, was in fact the same pattern which shaped the new birth of every believer. As we have already seen, the close relationship between the larger and smaller works of redemption was partly reflected in the sometimes ambiguous definition of the coming kingdom. Edwards pointed out that although the millennium was "the principle time" of the kingdom of heaven, it also had been "in a degree set up

soon after Christ's resurrection, and...the Christian church in all ages of it is called the kingdom of heaven...."[15] If the individual's advance towards salvation was indeed of a piece with the larger progress towards the world's redemption, then we may be able to gain some insight into the substance, style and psychology of the larger work by looking at the smaller replica.

I

One inevitable consequence of the revivals was a practical one: ministers who welcomed it into their parishes had little free time for detailed study of the prophecies. A seemingly endless number of townspeople called on them for advice about their "soul troubles." With so many earnest requests for spiritual guidance, we can well sympathize with Thomas Prince's joyful—and yet a trifle bewildered—recounting of the flood.

> And now was such a Time as we never knew. The Rev. Mr. Cooper was won't to say, that more came to him in one Week in deep Concern about their Souls, than in the whole twenty-four Years of his preceeding Ministry. I can also say the same as to the Numbers who repaired to me. By Mr. Cooper's Letter to his Friend in Scotland, it appears, he has had about six Hundred different Persons in three Months Time: and Mr. Webb informs me, he has had in the same Space above a Thousand.[16]

From all over came similar reports. Jonathan Dickinson

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[15] Edwards, Works, I, 491.

[16] Prince Jr., ed., Christian History, II, 391.

thought that at the height of his awakening, more came to him in one day than had before in half a year's time. And John White, who tended a parish in the fishing town of Gloucester, Maine, aptly remarked that before, he had "not ordinarily fished for souls with a net, but with an angling rod."[17]

The scores of parishioners may have surprised their ministers, but they did not catch them unprepared. New Englanders were no strangers to soul troubles, and their Puritan predecessors had long before provided detailed guides to the appropriate paths a soul travelled from darkness into light. Authorities differed on details (some broke the process into as many as ten steps) but everyone agreed about the basic points.[18] The traditional state of a "civil," unconverted man was a numb sleepiness. No matter how regularly he attended church or how superficially pious he appeared, underneath lay a spiritual pride; a secret conviction that his good works were acceptable to God. Thus a man's first step towards salvation was an awareness of his total sinfulness. He had to realize that the moral law which demanded perfection convicted him in the eyes of the divine Judge. God swept away every excuse and prop he had hoped would gain him eternal life. Finally, from out of this ultimate despair

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[17] Shipton, Sibley's Harvard Graduates, IV, 422.

[18] For a more detailed description of this morphology, see Edmund S. Morgan, Visible Saints (Ithaca, 1963), pp. 66-73. C. C. Goen discusses its application to the Awakening in Yale Works, IV, 25-32.

came the new birth: the faith that God, through his love and mercy, had granted salvation. This grace acted as a new "inward principle" of the soul, first re-ordering a man's relation to God, and then transforming his relations with others in the world.

It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of the conversion experience. For New Englanders, the process itself was perhaps more important than the theology. Every child knew the theology—almost as soon as he was able to understand anything. But salvation lay not in the intellectual apprehension of the gospel; even devils possessed this "historical faith." In effect, unconverted men were no better off than devils unless they had experienced these truths through the proper emotional and spiritual pilgrimage. And the pivotal point in this pilgrimage was the stage of conviction. Salvation came not through gradual enlightenment or a discipline which progressively eliminated sin (there would be time enough for that when the confirmed saint grew in holiness). It came through judgment; and with judgment came self-abasement. Up to a certain key point on the road to eternal life, things got better and better only insofar as they got worse and worse.

This pattern of progress through affliction, of redemption through judgment, was embedded in the Christian and, for that matter, the Hebrew tradition. The Old Testament prophets continually called for a "return to the Lord; for he has torn, that he may heal us; he has stricken, and he will

bind us up."[19] And at the center of the New Testament, the crucifixion stood as the greatest example of life through death and victory through self-abasement. The pivotal point in Edwards' History of Redemption was Christ's incarnation into a life of suffering and humiliation. Step by step Edwards took his listeners along the bitter path to that last evening of betrayal:

> And here was his greatest humiliation and suffering. ... First, his life was sold by one of his own disciples for thirty pieces of silver, which was the price of the life of a servant, as you may see in Exod. xxi. 32. Then he was in that dreadful agony in the garden; There came such a dismal gloom upon his soul, that he began to be sorrowful and very heavy.... So violent was the agony of his soul, as to force the blood through the pores of his skin; so that while his soul was overwhelmed with amazing sorrow, his body was all clotted with blood.... The officers and soldiers apprehend and bind him; his disciples forsake him and flee; his own best friends do not stand by him to comfort him, in this time of his distress.... At length, being come to Mount Calvary, they execute the sentence which Pilate had so unrighteously pronounced. They nail him to his cross, by his hands and feet, then raise it erect, and fix one end in the ground, he being still suspended on it by the nails which pierced his hands and feet. And now Christ's sufferings are come to the extremity: now the cup which he so earnestly prayed that it might pass from him, is come, and he must, he does drink it.[20]

So it was that Christ purchased men's salvations, and so it was that men had to follow him to make that salvation their own. His death and resurrection freed them from the bondage of the law, but it did not free them from the spiritual pilgrimage itself. Without God's grace, man could not be saved;

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[19] Hosea 6:1.

[20] Edwards, Works, I, 414-15.

but that grace came only through a process of humiliation and suffering which—however weakly—paralleled Christ's own humiliation and suffering.

This tradition had been present, of course, throughout Christian history. But the Puritan emphasis on the morphology of conversion, itself a miniature imitatio Christi, gave the pattern a renewed strength. And now those who had been awakened spoke of a "new birth," possible only through the symbolical death of the old, carnal man. In stressing this experience, the New Lights were only highlighting an old tradition; but they did it with such zeal that many ministers thought things had gone too far.

Old and New Lights did not fight about the necessity of conviction itself: everyone admitted the need for that. Charles Chauncy acknowledged that any convert had to pass through a stage where he was "driven out of his former Ease, and fill'd with Anxiety and Distress." And although he attacked the mannerisms of New Light converts, he cautioned that in doing so, he did not mean "to express a dislike of that Fear, excited by a just Sense of Sin, which in Respect of adult Persons, is ordinarily previous to their Conversion...." What Chauncy abhorred was the emotional, often dramatic style of preaching meant to encourage a deep sense of conviction, and the equally emotional outbursts of those laboring under it. "The Passion of Fear may be excited not only from a just Representation of Truth to the Mind by the SPIRIT of GOD, but from the natural Influence of awful Words

and frightful Gestures."[21]

New Lights thought Chauncy made too much of the Awakening's aberrations and underestimated the importance of thorough conviction. They were initially surprised by the spontaneous outbursts of distressed church-goers, but found it harder to claim that this deep agony was necessarily fraudulent and improper. When one woman cried out in the middle of John Cotton's service, he pleaded with her "to endeavor to compose her self, so that she might join with us in the Worship of GOD...." But he could not help observing that the "Scene was very affecting to the Congregation; and some that were under great concern before, and were as full as they could hold, could not now help manifesting themselves...."[22] It was only a small step to the conclusion that these outcries were a positive help in trying to arouse convictions in others. James Robe, a Scottish divine, argued that if God struck "secure Sinners with the Terrors of his Wrath, whereby they are made, from a felt sense of their perishing Condition, to cry out.... Why must these Trophies of Victory be removed out of the Assembly?" Arousing the agony of conviction was an indispensable part of taking Trophies of Victory, and Robe could write with straight-faced relish of the "Noise of the Distress'd" in his own services. "It was pleasant to hear those who were in a state of Enmity with God. [All

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[21]Charles Chauncy, Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New England (Boston, 1743), pp. 5, 79, 80.

[22]Prince Jr., ed., Christian History, I, 261-62.

about were] Despisers of Jesus Christ, and Satan's contented slaves, some of them crying out for mercy, some that they were lost and undone...."[23]

Respectable supporters of the Awakening tried to disassociate themselves from the type of preaching which relied merely on the terror of "awful Words and frightful Gestures." But they did it in a way which by no means lessened the role of conviction. Prince made the point as strongly as he could by pointing out that while earthquakes and storms often aroused simple terror, such fears sadly vanished soon after. "Nothing is more obvious than for people to be greatly terrified...and yet have no Convictions." Simple fright failed because it alarmed men too little, not too much. Thus Prince thought Gilbert Tennent's preaching was effective not so much because he laid the terrors of the Law open to them "(for this they could pretty well bear, as long as they hoped these belonged not to them, or they could easily avoid them;)" but because he laid open to sinners "their many vain and secret Shifts and Refuges, counterfeit Resemblances of Grace, delusive and damning Hopes...."[24]

There were limits to this approach; limits made painfully clear by the melancholic suicide of Joseph Hawley, one of Edwards' parishioners. It was a grim reminder that the pattern could go wrong, and Edwards noted with unease the

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[23] Ibid., pp. 36, 26.

[24] Ibid., II, 388-90.

number of people who "had it urged upon 'em, as if somebody had spoke to 'em, 'Cut your own throat, now is a good opportunity: now, NOW!'"[25] Such events warned ministers not to push despair to the breaking point, but they dared not retreat too far in the opposite direction. Edwards, who penetrated the psychology of conviction with as much sensitivity as anyone, realized this, and brilliantly detailed the tightrope ministers were forced to walk in their spiritual counselling. On the one hand, they had to insist that God was under no obligation to show mercy to the unconverted:

> If I had taught those that came to me under trouble any other doctrine, I should have taken a most direct course utterly to have undone them; I should have directly crossed what was plainly the drift of the Spirit of God in his influences upon them.... And yet those that have been under awakenings have oftentimes plainly stood in need of being encouraged, by being told of the infinite and all-sufficient mercy of God in Christ; and that 'tis God's manner to succeed diligence and to bless his own means, that so awakenings and encouragements, fear and hope may be duly mixed and proportioned to preserve their minds in a just medium between the two extremes of self-flattery and despondence, both which tend to slackness and negligence, and in the end to security.[26]

And so the tension inevitably remained: between hope and despair, between mercy and judgment. Salvation through conviction was too much a part of the New England heritage to have it any other way. The death and resurrection at the heart of Christianity exemplified it; the Puritan morphology of con-

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[25] Yale Works, IV, 206-07.

[26] Ibid., pp. 167-68. Edwards provides a superb description of the morphology of conversion through this section (pp. 159-91).

version expounded it; and the new birth of the Awakening heightened it.

The same perspective that informed conversion—the Smallest Awakening—also pervaded thinking about Greater Awakenings and the Work of Redemption as a whole. God redeemed history the same way he redeemed men. (Or to put the same proposition Tutonically, just as ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny, so Seelenheil recapitulates Heilsgeschichte!) Thus the idea of salvation through trial and conviction could be applied at any number of levels as the basic pattern God used to bring deliverance. On a relatively small scale, the revival of a single congregation was often pictured as occurring only after a time of spiritual declension and deadness. But the same pattern could be used to understand the awakenings of whole towns, provinces and countries. God brought his showers of grace only after humbling his people and demonstrating to them their impotence. In a larger sense, these social applications of the conversion model were incorporated into interpretations of the prophecies, past and future. The history of the church fell into periods which were each cast as a time when help from the Lord came only after the faithful were reduced to the direst of straits. And the entire work of redemption recapitulated the smaller repetitions of the pattern with its final struggle at Armageddon against the massed forces of antichrist, and even beyond that, the ultimate battle against Gog and Magog after the church had stumbled at the end of the millennium. In short, if we wish to

construct a "model of progress" which adequately reflects the thinking of millennial theologians, the morphology of conversion provides an excellent starting point.

One example of the way the conviction-conversion pattern was applied to a social rather than personal situation can be seen in the case of Peter Thacher. Thacher found himself, at the end of a long career, preaching to an audience which remained steadfastly unmoved while neighboring towns were joining the revival. He became increasingly discouraged about his effectiveness and was on the verge of resigning when Gilbert Tennent arrived in town and straightaway preached a rousing, successful sermon. This was humbling enough; but Tennent unwittingly made matters worse when he asserted that by his standards, the sermon had been a failure, and "that he never was so shut up but once." This was too much for poor Thacher, who confessed to the visiting minister all his "Discouragements in the Ministry." Tennent seemed "tenderly affected," and "on parting had such a Word as this, oft'times 'tis darkest a little before Day, the rising Sun will bring Light."[27] The response was entirely traditional, and quite appropriate. Edwards used the same image to describe an individual's conviction ("it looks as black as midnight to them a little before the day dawns in their souls");[28] and Tennent was only applying to one particular congregation the pattern

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[27]Prince Jr., ed., Christian History, II, 88.

[28]Yale Works, IV, 162.

God had used in accomplishing the Great Awakening itself. When Thomas Foxcroft defended the revival, he scolded those who failed to recognize how plainly recent events were following the pattern set down by Scripture. That the late effusions had come in times of trouble was "a marvellous fulfilling of that Scripture, When the Enemy cometh in like a Flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a Standard." The flourishing revival stood in stark contrast to the previous state of religion: "Ah! what a melancholy Prospect we had not long since.... But how has the cloudy Face of Things, even on a sudden, very much chang'd...."[29]

This was applying the model in its simplest form, and if that had been the only way it was used, it would support nicely the traditional view of the Awakening as a watershed for millennial thought. Before the revivals, New England stood in the darkness of conviction; with them, it entered upon the upward and gradual task of perseverance on the road to perfect sanctification. But we have already seen that the psychology of conviction was more complex. A soul laboring under awakenings had to maintain the proper spiritual balance between hope and despair. On a personal level, ministers were responsible for regulating that delicate balance through the proper application of comfort and affliction, the external correlates of hope and despair. On the grander level of the work of redemption, the ultimate management of the

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[29]Preface to Jonathan Dickinson, The True Scripture-Doctrine (Boston, 1741), i-ii.

church's spiritual estate fell to God. His task was to bring in the kingdom by maintaining in the world the proper balance of providential judgments and mercies. Remaining true to the pattern of conversion, the millennial view of history proclaimed that the salvation of the church would come as the tempo of reward and affliction increased, until a dramatic resolution was achieved in the millennial state.

Now if this reading of prophetic thought is correct, then New Englanders' conceptions of eschatology cannot be explained merely by contrasting a pessimistic catastrophism with an optimistic progressivism. Instead we find ministers repeating two seemingly contradictory statements. The first was that the state of the world was getting better and better, and would continue to do so. The second was that Satan, seeing his kingdom effectively threatened, would make more and more trouble. Millennialists resolved the contradiction (or never noticed it in the first place) because they assumed that evil, instead of diminishing as goodness spread, would become more persistent in its opposition. Hence the common adage that the more Satan was vanquished, the more he raged; and conversely, that the more the church was pressed down, the more it flourished.

An understanding of this pattern helps to explain the paradoxical contradictions we have already discovered in early eighteenth century millennial thought. Viewed in this light, Samuel Willard's Checkered State of the Gospel Church has a more coherent rationale for being checkered. He could declare

that the millennium might begin before men were aware of it (and thus "have its gradual increase"); yet at the same time assert that darkness was a sign that the times were hastening on (for it was always darkest before the day). The two opinions were compatible because bringing "the Church into a more dark and dismal state than it is at the present...is designed in his Counsel, to make way for her deliverance."[30] For the same reasons, Samuel Sewall could note that "God many times sets one thing against another: and we may hope that Unparall'd Severity will be succeeded by superabundant BENIGNITY." This pattern made it comprehensible to talk of a darkness which was yet "irradiated" by a "concomitant Rainbow," and conclude that "tho' the Storm increase and grow never so Violent; yet this Angel persists with Courage and Constancy to proclaim the certain approach of a Fair Day."[31]

It was this pattern in the millennial outlook which united New Englanders' apparently disparate interpretations of the Revelation—and not any consistent agreement on chronology. Sewall's and Willard's sentiments were of a piece with those of Benjamin Colman and Nicholas Noyes. Even the Mathers viewed the last days with the same combination of gloom and hope. Their differences sprang from temperaments which increased the frenetic tempo of conflicting good and

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[30]Samuel Willard, Checkered State of the Gospel Church (Boston, 1701), pp. 53, 63, 30.

[31]Sewall, Phenomena, Preface; also Proposals Touching the Accomplishment of Prophecies (Boston, 1713), pp. 5-6.

evil beyond the boundaries most ministers were willing to set. Cotton could not be satisfied with a simple triumph of the church; the hints of revolutions abroad were always "amazing" and "wonderful." Joel's prediction of the holy spirit poured on all flesh assumed virtually ecstatic proportions ("They are coming! They are coming! They are coming!") while the prospect of the conflagration found him relishing the violent punishment of a sleepy, corrupt world. Cotton dreamed dreams of ecstasy and nightmares of blackness like no one else in New England, but the pattern shaping those dreams was still the same. God mingled light and darkness to bring history to its consummation.

This theory of history certainly worked well in times of declension. When God's providences seemed afflictive, and spiritual deadness or physical earthquakes were the order of the day, the rhetoric of conversion became a theodicy of comfort: reassurance that God's chastisements were not merely obstacles to be got around, but judgments which sanctified the elect.

The Awakening did not alter the basic perspective. This can be seen, first, by an examination of the prophetic interpretations themselves. Newer expositions by Daniel Whitby and Moses Lowman did not provide any fundamentally new approaches to salvation history. And supporters of the Awakening had no qualms about citing older prophetic tracts. Even Edwards' new ideas about the slaying of the witnesses were based on assumptions common to the traditional eschato-

logical framework. Secondly, the Awakening itself, with all its attendant controversies and excesses, created an emotional climate which elicited the usual prophetic responses. The combination of gloom and hope in the conversion model of redemption not only governed New Lights' evaluation of their historical position; it also actually worked to bend social realities towards the patterns it expected and predicted.

II

Daniel Whitby, a liberal divine in the Church of England, joined the ranks of English expositors in 1703 with his own thoughts about the Revelation of John. This treatise, along with his larger Paraphrase and Commentary on the New Testament, enjoyed a publishing history which extended well into the nineteenth century. It was reprinted in America as late as 1848, when it formed part of a larger four volume Scripture commentary by several eminent Biblical scholars. By that time, the notions of pre- and post-millennial theologies had been explicitly worked out, and Henry Dana Ward could point to Whitby's work as the first example of a post-millennial formulation.[32] From his point of view, the claim made good sense: the title of the tract was enough to demonstrate it. A Treatise of the True Millennium, Whitby had called it, appending the usual long subtitle, Shewing that it

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[32]Henry Ward, History and Doctrine of the Millennium (Boston, 1840), quoted in Tuveson, Redeemer Nation, p. 40.

is not a Reign of Persons Raised from the Dead, but of the Church Flourishing gloriously for a Thousand Years after the Conversion of the Jews, and the Flowing in of all Nations to them Thus Converted to the Christian Faith. But Whitby's reasons for contesting Mede's interpretation were not Henry Ward's.[33] His objections, as usual, sprang not from any grand new philosophical viewpoint, but from a peculiar textual reading of scripture.

Whitby was particularly interested in the Jews, a group of people all good millennialists kept their eyes on. Having "employ'd some Thoughts upon the Mystery of the Conversion of the Jewish nation," Whitby concluded that Paul's promise of the Jews' salvation in Romans 11 referred to the same time as the Revelation's thousand year reign. "The New Heavens and New Earth, were the very Things promised to the Jews," he reasoned, concluding that "the true Millennium is only a Reign of Converted Jews, and of the Gentiles flowing into them."[34] This meant that Gentile Christians played a comparatively minor part in the final drama, but Whitby thought the scriptures justified his interpretation. After all, the Jews were God's first chosen people; and Christ's personal ministry had been "only among them, whence he is

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[33]Ward said that his contemporaries generally preferred the prospect of a spiritualized millennium, with no supernatural occurrences or times of sore affliction intervening. Ibid.

[34]The Treatise can be found in Daniel Whitby, A Paraphrase and Commentary of the New Testament (London, 1727), Introduction, p. 9.

stiled The Minister of the Circumcision." How natural, then, that the now dead Jewish community would revive and "become a most famous Church again."[35]

Whitby was not proposing anything radically new simply by including converted Jews in the millennial reign. Virtually everyone accepted that point. But by pushing Israel to the center of the stage, as the nation principally intended by the millennial prophecies, he raised some embarrassing questions, and slighted Gentile sensibilities to boot. If Jews were to be the principal benefactors of the thousand years, how had the first resurrection come to be associated with "Christian Martyrs beheaded for the Name of Christ, or to be fulfilled in the Resurrection of them only who are chiefly Christians, not of the Jews but of the Gentiles?" Jews certainly had not been slain for the true faith, and hence if Whitby was right in his interpretation, the only conclusion left was that the first resurrection was a spiritual one, referring to the revival of the Jewish church.[36]

To bolster this argument, Whitby claimed that a millennial reign of supernaturally raised martyrs was full of inconsistencies anyway. This was a bit ironic, since opponents of his position had levelled the same charge against a metaphorical first resurrection.[37] Now Whitby used their own

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[35] Ibid., p. 10; other proofs, pp. 11-15.

[36] Ibid., p. 15.

[37] See above, Chapter 2, for Increase Mather's views on this subject.

strategy against them. What was so consistent about an earthly paradise peopled with unearthly saints? The shoe just did not fit.

> Can a spiritual body, free from grossness and ponderosity, from needing rest, sleep, clothing, sustenance, receive advantage from that universal plenty...or need those goods of fortune that external felicity, that temporal happiness, he hath provided it for upon earth? ... Can the Devil, when loosed, be so foolish, as to summon up his Armies to fight against, and kill them who are immortal, and can die no more? Can Gog and Magog, with all their numerous Host, hope to prevail against them, or even dare to assault such shining radiant Bodies as they then will have? In a word, can such bodies need or receive any farther Exaltation to fit them for heaven, or for their elevation into the Clouds, to be forever with the Lord? If not, why should they live a thousand Years after God had thus fitted and prepared them for their Habitation in the highest Heavens?[38]

To Whitby, these inconsistencies belied a misunderstanding of the "true Genius of the Christian Faith." They displayed an unhealthy preoccupation with earthly pleasures. Christians were supposed to be "intirely dead to the World, and to the things of the World"; hence it would be incongruous for God to hold up the vision of an earthly paradise as a goal worth striving for. Jesus had told his disciples to lay up treasures in heaven, not on earth; and if that eternal paradise was the proper reward for suffering martyrs, there was "just reason to conclude our Lord, and his Apostles, knew nothing of this Reign on Earth, or thought it no great matter of [the martyrs'] Consolation...."[39]

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[38] Whitby, Treatise, p. 25.

[39] Ibid., pp. 27-28.

We would be wrong to view these sentiments as part of a more general world-denying asceticism. Despite the reproofs, Whitby maintained his own thousand years of outward peace and prosperity. What is more important to understand is how the vision of a millennium, and the prophecies in general, were used in this theology. Those scriptures, like many other parts of the Bible, were "Gospel-Promises"—but promises of a particular sort, designed especially for Christians who needed "Consolation and Encouragement, under the Troubles of this present World." John had originally written the Revelation in order to comfort believers and raise their morale in difficult times. Whitby, like those before him, assumed the prophecies were to be used in this same way. "In a word," he concluded, "to foretel Times of Peace and Plenty to succeeding Ages, to raise the Expectation of a People whose backs are bowed down, and have been long enslaved and afflicted, is very suitable to this divine Oeconomy"; but to promise material rewards in return for "piety and patience" was "too mean, too much beneath the sublime Spirit of Christianity."[40]

The Treatise was not meant to be a full scale commentary on the Revelation; it attempted only to prove its specific case for a millennium consisting primarily of the spiritual revival of the Jewish church. Although Whitby had written amply on the rest of the New Testament canon, he left

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[40] Ibid., pp. 27-28.

the last book of the Bible alone, claiming he had neither "sufficient reading nor judgment to discern the intendment of the prophecies contained in that book."[41] One man who was less modest about his own abilities was Moses Lowman, an English nonconformist. Most of Lowman's years were spent as a minister at Clapham, where his preaching showed much diligence and apparently little else. His strong point was hermeneutics, not homiletics. In 1738 he issued a Paraphrase and Notes upon the Revelation of St. John, which nicely complemented Whitby's other commentaries. Later editors recognized this and published both men's expositions in one volume.

Lowman agreed with most of the specific arguments in Whitby's Treatise, and more important, with its underlying conception of the prophecies as comforting promises. The tenor of John's visions seemed clear: the church was continually being subjected to "a melancholy state of long and prevailing corruption." It certainly would have been nicer to have a more pleasant tale, but the function of prophecy was "to foretell things as they shall really be, how afflictive soever." When actual events confirmed these dismal predictions, Christians were provided with assurance of a rather backhanded—but nonetheless comforting—sort. Precisely because things looked so bad in the world, the church had the greatest grounds for hope: all was going according to God's

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[41] Quoted in Moses Lowman, A Paraphrase on the Revelation of St. John, in Simon Patrick, et al., A Critical Commentary and Paraphrase on the Old and New Testament (Philadelphia, 1848), IV, 1012.

plan. Prophecy was most helpful

> when we might be tempted to forsake true religion, by the power of prevailing error and reigning corruption; or when we might be greatly dejected, and despair of success, where opposition to true religion is so powerful and violent, as hardly to leave a reasonable prospect of bearing up against it. In such a state of things, which has often happened, it has been the use of prophecy, to keep up the hearts of good men with lively and affecting representations of the majesty, the power and goodness of God....[42]

Lowman proceeded to apply this general motif to his own specific interpretations of the prophecies. Mede had been wrong, he thought, in using synchronisms to conflate various sections of the Revelation. John's book foretold three distinct periods of history, and none of the visions describing them overlapped. Hence the sounding of the trumpets followed chronologically the opening of the seals; and after both came the prophecies in the "little book" about the temple, the slain witnesses, and the seven vials. Lowman explained that each period was actually a miniature replica of the larger pattern of salvation he had already described. Within each time span, there was a "state of danger, opposition and trouble" for the church, whose worsening affliction was remarkably removed to introduce a state of "peace, safety and happiness." It was the afflictive model of progress at work: things getting better only as they got worse.

Thus although the first period began with some gospel successes, the church's harassment by Rome increased as it drew to a close. Just before Constantine appeared for the

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[42] Ibid., pp. 1012-14.

Church's deliverance, "severe persecutions were almost perpetually renewed," and "seemed to threaten the utter destruction" of those who would not renounce their faith. But the brief respite under Constantine did not last long. The trumpets marked a time when a whole swarm of idolatrous nations endangered the gains that had been made. Mahomet in particular was so successful that he seemed to "threaten the ruin of the Christian name and religion in the east." But Charles Martel in 734 saved the day by preserving the western parts of the empire.[43] One suspects Martel had this greatness thrust upon him not so much because of his stunning efforts on behalf of the faith but because Lowman's adoption of a non-synchronal time scheme meant he had to hurry things along in order to have enough room for his third and greatest period.

That began in 1756 when Pepin helped the Pope wrest the Papal state free of the influence of the Lombardys, thus signalling the start of more trouble for the church. At the same time, Lowman had to get right to work pouring his vials, since he calculated each one took about 200 years to complete. But because he began them at a time when antichrist was everywhere triumphing, his angels seemed to be pouring with a rather indiscriminate aim. The Popes deceived multitudes, the priesthood hunted down true believers, and the crusades spilled just about everybody's blood.[44] The fifth

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[43] Ibid., pp. 1016-17. [44] Ibid., p. 1087.

vial, poured at the time of the Reformation, did better at hitting the mark, and Lowman predicted even greater judgments against Rome under the sixth and seventh vials. But since these remained in the future, one could only make tentative guesses. Perhaps the Turks would invade the papal dominions sometime between 1700-1900; and as for the last battle at Armageddon, "we can only guess at the historical events." But the specifics did not really matter; the mere knowledge that God would triumph was sufficient "to encourage patience and faithfulness, from hope in God's promises of protection and deliverance...."[45]

In short, although Lowman agreed with Whitby's interpretation of the first resurrection (and referred readers to arguments in the Treatise for "full satisfaction" on the point), that event hardly dominated his conception of the apocalypse. It would likely not occur until the year 2016, and until that time, the prophecies would perform their usual function of encouraging patience, faith and hope. And these virtues were hardly designed to foster an activist theology. Lowman went out of his way to answer the objection that the study of the Revelation had "dangerous consequences" that would encourage "great disorders." Actually, the prophecies preached the contrary: "Here are no directions, or the least encouragements given to the church, or Christians, as saints, but to patience and perseverance...no encouragement of sedi-

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[45] Ibid., pp. 1082-83.

tion or mutiny, of violence and injustice, no not to their greatest enemies or in their greatest dangers." The faithful were instructed to "wait the time God has appointed for their deliverance; hoping that God will, by his own hand of providence, execute his designs."[46] If anything, Lowman's interpretation of the Revelation emphasized more than most, prophecy's essential task of providing comfort under trials.

It is important to realize that the question of the chronology of the last events did not significantly alter this common attitude of expositors. New Englanders had plenty of specific interpretations they could disagree about; Whitby and Lowman provided two more.[47] Furthermore, the Awakening did not produce any dramatic change in opinions. As Edwin Gaustad has remarked, the revivals were notable not for an abundance of millennial sermons but for the lack of them. With the exception of Edwards, no New England divine published any extended speculations about the prophecies; what evidence there is suggests that differences of interpretation remained. We must assume Benjamin Colman and Joseph

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[46] Ibid., p. 1019.

[47] It was not long before Whitby's views were attacked by Charles Daubuz, a Huguenaut exile whose thousand page commentary strongly opposed any expanded role for the Jews during the millennium, and reasserted the necessity of a literal first resurrection. Lowman, of course, disagreed with Daubuz' views, but used the volume to buttress certain of his own textual readings. See Charles Daubuz, A Perpetual Commentary on the Revelation of St. John (London, 1720), pp. 39-40, 46-47, 869, 908-09, 929. (Daubuz' title may at first appear to claim too much for his work, but anyone who tries to plow through the volume will have to admit that reading it certainly feels like a perpetual labor.)

Sewall continued firm in their belief that the conflagration followed the millennial reign. On the other hand, Thomas Prince supported a version of the end similar to the Mathers'. If he changed his opinion during the Awakening, he did it silently and then reverted to his old position by 1755.

James Davenport was one who did make an issue out of eschatology. He shocked many listeners by claiming "some extraordinary discovery and assurance of the very near approach of the end of the world." Although he would not name a specific time, he did think that the earth would shortly "be involved in devouring flames."[48] Only a few years earlier, Gilbert Tennent had described a similarly vivid last judgment. All across the globe "Rivers of Fire!" would cause "general Ruin," thus preparing the way for Christ's appearance in the "Regions of the Air." Tennent did not commit himself to an imminent coming, but he did note that God kept his plans secret in order "to awaken our Fears, excite our Diligence, and support our Patience: That not knowing the exact Time of our Lord's coming, we may be every Day expecting of it, and preparing for it." The sermon did not note what specific theory of the last days Tennent held, but such statements seem difficult to reconcile with the firm belief that a thousand years of peace and prosperity remained before Christ's coming.[49]

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[48] James Davenport, Boston Weekly Newsletter, July 4, 1742.

[49] Gilbert Tennent, The Solemn Scene (Boston, 1739), p. 221. Tennent published this sermon before the full flowering

Although these differences of opinion about specific interpretations remained, supporters of the Awakening shared the same general eschatological perspective. They saw nothing new about their attitudes concerning the redemption of history, and thought, quite rightly, that their predecessors had believed as they did. Thus when opponents pressed them to defend their positions, they found it easy to cite older sermons as proof of their legitimacy.

Thomas Prince took on this task in The Christian History. New England had experienced smaller revivals and by providing the magazine with accounts of them, Prince hoped to demonstrate that the present Awakening was merely a grander form of what had before been accepted as a work of God. More important for our purposes, Prince's excerpts indicate that New Englanders were not doing anything new in interpreting revivals as foretastes of the millennial period. In 1721, Eliphalet Adams celebrated the rash of conversions at Windham, Connecticut, with the same hopeful rhetoric present in the Awakening. "Who can tell," he cried, "but that as he hath begun to pour out his good Spirit, so he may please to perfect the good Work and cause the good Savour of his Knowledge to spread far and wide?" Certainly the times were "drawing

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of the Awakening, and it might be objected that possibly the revivals changed his views. I have found no evidence of this. We have already seen (above, Chapter 3) that Tennent thought in 1755 that calamities might be at hand. He expressed a similar opinion in 1742 when he remarked that "the Times are dangerous we live in, perhaps the revival of GOD's Work in divers Places is but a prelude to a Storm." Boston Weekly Newsletter, April 15, 1742.

nearer" when the "whole Earth may be filled with the Knowledge of the Glory of the Lord."[50] Fifteen years earlier Samuel Danforth had expressed similar thoughts after a revival in his own parish at Taunton. He believed that quite possibly "the Time of the pouring out of the SPIRIT upon all Flesh may be at the Door."[51]

Danforth's particular choice of scripture is interesting, since Joel's prophecy was also one of Cotton Mather's favorites. Mather may have sometimes thought the conflagration imminent, but he also waxed ecstatic in the belief that angels of the Holy Spirit were coming! coming! to spread the Gospel across the land. So it was that when Thomas Foxcroft began casting around for an appropriate source to quote in a discussion of the Signs of the Times during the Awakening, he lit on a passage out of Mather's Theopolis Americana. Cotton had not found it at all inconsistent to talk hopefully of a coming "holy City in AMERICA" while still worrying about the sinful sleepy state of New England; and Foxcroft did not find it at all inconsistent to borrow from such theology.[52]

One man who apparently did was Jonathan Edwards. The only significant piece of eschatological reinterpretation to

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[50] Prince Jr., ed., Christian History, I, 132-34. Originally published in Eliphalet Adams, A Sermon preached at Windham (New London, 1721), vi, 40.

[51] Prince Jr., ed., Christian History, I, 111.

[52] Foxcroft, Preface, in Dickinson, True Scripture-Doctrine, ii-iii. Foxcroft is quoting from Cotton Mather, Theopolis Americana (Boston, 1710), p. 42.

come out of the Awakening was his Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God's People in Extraordinary Prayer...Pursuant to Scripture Promises and Prophecies Concerning the Last Times. Edwards here advocated the spread of a practice begun by ministers in Scotland: weekly and quarterly prayer meetings designed to seek God's aid in reviving the flagging spirit of the Awakening. The prophecies were the principal source of encouragement to the faithful, since they predicted a spread of the holy spirit in the latter days. But Edwards foresaw one major problem. Many prophetic expositors had argued that the slaying of the witnesses in Revelation 11 was yet to be accomplished. If that were true, then the scriptures predicted a desolate time ahead for the faithful. The witnesses were a symbol of the true churches in the world, and before their final resurrection, the beast was to have killed them and triumphed for three and a half days.[53] Obviously, Edwards reasoned, those who agreed with that interpretation would find it "a great damp to their hope, courage and activity," since they would never see the dawning of the millennium: only the "dismal time that shall precede it." Why would anyone want to pray to hasten on a time when religion would be almost totally extinguished?[54] So Edwards concluded that interpreters had

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[53]Rev. 11:7-12. Readers should remember not to confuse this resurrection with the first and second resurrections associated more immediately with the millennium.

[54]Edwards, Works, III, 472.

misread the Revelation, and that the witnesses had already been slain. Men could join the concert of prayer without fearing terrible times ahead.

All this certainly seems to substantiate the belief that Edwards reinterpreted the chronology of last events in order to purge millennial thought of its darker features. What makes the case especially strong is not the shift in chronology per se (Cotton Mather among others believed the witnesses had already been slain) but Edwards' open and explicit declaration that the prospect of black times ahead for the church would contribute to a detrimental psychological attitude on the part of believers. No doubt Edwards' interpretation did differ from his predecessors. But when the specific arguments in the Humble Attempt are set in the overall context of the treatise, and the larger framework of Edwards' eschatology, what seems at first a momentous change becomes more properly a shift in emphasis.

Edwards, as we have seen, was no newcomer to prophetic speculation. He had already formed his own opinions on the major points of interpretation when he began his apocalyptic notebook in 1723. In general, his reconstruction of the latter days had more in common with the ideas of Willard and Colman than with those of the Mathers or Thomas Prince. The notebook's early entries accepted Mede's traditional opinion that only two vials had been poured—one by Wycliff and Hus, and the other by the coming of the Reformation. At that rate, it would take a good deal of time to get all seven

finished off, and Edwards placed the fifth as late as 1866. That nicely coincided with the termination of the church's forty-two months (or 1260 days) in the wilderness. Satan's final overthrow would be complete by about the year 2000, in time to begin the seventh millennium of the world's existence. The fitness of that scheme was obvious: "The first six thousand years are six days of labor, and the seventh is a sabbath of rest."[55]

Edwards thought, as had many before him, that this millennial sabbath would not involve a literal resurrection of the martyrs. When the Revelation spoke of a resurrection, this meant only that the Christian spirit which had been reflected in the devotion of former persecuted saints would then rise to prominence in their successors, the saints of the millennial period. The connection between the two groups lay in the essential act of regeneration common to all Christians. The new birth in the individual had a double fulfillment, first in the spiritual change achieved in this life, and secondly in the final glorification after death. And this process was repeated on a larger scale: "As there is a spiritual resurrection, a first resurrection of particular believers, so there is a coming spiritual resurrection of the world in general...."[56] The second resurrection, of course, was literal summoning all saints to the glorification which

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[55]Stein, "Notes," I, 68.

[56]Ibid., p. 100; also p. 135.

followed the final triumph over Gog, Magog and Satan.

This was the general position Edwards had formulated at the beginning of his career. His active mind hardly let the matter rest however, and the notebook charts the changes in his eschatology over the years. And there certainly were changes. But Edwards spent an inordinate amount of time—from our point of view—polishing up the same kind of miscellaneous conjectures which prophetic expositors typically relished. Like Samuel Sewall, he wondered how geography would influence the choice of a millennial capital. His candidate was Canaan, whose pivotal location between three continents made it "the most advantageously posited" site.[57] Or like Daniel Whitby, he spent time debating whether the Jewish nation would recapture its homeland and if so whether Gentiles could live within the borders. (The Jews would and the Gentiles could.) Edwards spent even more time wrestling with larger issues, but the changes in his position had few practical consequences.

One major puzzle concerned the meaning of the New Heavens and New Earth mentioned in Revelation 21-22. Did they refer to the millennial state, or the final heavenly paradise? Expositors who envisioned the thousand years as a period when immortal martyrs populated the earth found it much easier to assign the extravagant visions of those two

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[57] Ibid., pp. 76-77. Edwards did not call this spot the New Jerusalem as Sewall had, because of a different interpretation of Rev. 21-22 (discussed below). But both men were referring to the central locus of the millennial reign.

chapters to the millennium. But Edwards noted, as Charles Chauncy had, that these blissful scenes followed the account of Judgment in Chapter 20, and thus described the heavenly state, which was "manifestly different from the millennium." But where Chauncy had gone on to suppose that the earth itself would be transformed into an immortal paradise, Edwards came to the opposite conclusion, just as Jonathan Mayhew had. The conflagration surely would not begin the millennium, since the most fire could do would be to restore the earth to its primitive state—and God would need a whole new creation to make a refined world.[58] On the other hand, St. Peter indicated that the earth would more likely be "kept in store for the fire" at the end of Judgment, "in which ungodly men are to be destroyed." Edwards could not decide whether this meant the earth became an eternal hell or not; but he was at least certain the New Heavens and New Earth would not be located on earth, or even within the solar system, since that would be destroyed at the final day.[59]

The whole question of what the New Heavens and Earth referred to continued to intrigue Edwards, and the more he thought about it, the more they seemed to him to have a wider application. This followed from his premise that prophecies generally had a double fulfillment, a dictum which he relied

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[58] Ibid., pp. 91-94.

[59] Ibid., p. 132. The sentence quoted originally read "Everlasting fire" for sinners "forever destroyed," but Edwards cancelled the adjectives.

on more and more in later expositions. His movement in this direction was most strikingly revealed in one of his long comments on the subject, which began with the assumption—already a change from the old position—that some parts of Revelation 21 and 22 referred to the millennium while other expressions were "too exalted for anything" but heaven. Yet by the time Edwards got around to finishing the note, he had concluded that "all parts of the description are applicable to those [two different] states of the church."[60] But all the thinking he expended on the problem provided little impetus for any far reaching changes.

Moses Lowman's Exposition, which Edwards began to read sometime after 1738, produced similarly minimal alterations. Edwards thought it absurd to deny the use of synchronisms, and contrary to "the method of almost all the prophecies of Scripture." Thus Lowman confounded "the order of the prophecies of this book more than former interpretations," and despite all his professions, could not avoid using synchronisms anyway. Furthermore, Lowman denied one of Edwards' favorite interpretational techniques: the use of a double fulfillment to explain prophecies.[61] These were definite flaws, but Edwards still found much useful information in the Exposition. What impressed him most was the judicious handling of the

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[60] Ibid., pp. 110-11, 114. By correlating the different color inks Edwards used, Stephen Stein has concluded that this note was written over a protracted period of time around 1732-33; Introduction, I, 131.

[61] Ibid., II, 316-18.

historical material associated with the pouring of the vials. Edwards copied relevant Extracts in his notebook, and dropped his old interpretation of the vials in favor of Lowman's assertion (proved "beyond all contradiction") that five vials had already been poured.[62] But since Lowman had started his vials earlier, and made them take longer, the net result was about the same in terms of Edwards' overall timetable. The sabbatic millennium, originally scheduled to begin around the year 2000, was only sixteen years later according to the newer computations.

In the end, Lowman's exposition proved a mixed blessing. Edwards' wholehearted acceptance of only half of it led him into a further puzzle: the slaying of the witnesses. What bothered him most was the extremity of the vision. The prophecy predicted that not only would the witnesses be killed but that their tormentors would leave the dead bodies unburied in the streets as a sign of public scorn. And Edwards could in no way imagine that the church would again be subject to such total debasement. Could anyone possibly expect, he asked,

> that Satan will ever find means to bring things to pass, that after all the increase of light that has been made in the world, since the Reformation, there shall be a return of a more dark time than in the depth of the darkness of Popery, before the Reformation, when the church of God shall be nearer total extinction, and have less visibility, all true religion and light be blotted out of the memories of mankind, Satan's kingdom of darkness be more firmly established, all monuments of true religion be more abolished, and that the state of the world should be such, that it

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[62] Ibid., p. 404.

> should appear further from any hope of a revival of true religion than it has ever done; is this conceivable...?[63]

Further, if this improbable setback was yet in the future, how could it fit in with Lowman's schedule of the vials? With only two left to go before the final battle of Armageddon, there was no room to squeeze it in—unless one assumed that Armageddon and the slaying of the witnesses referred to the same event. But surely that was impossible, since the saints fought their final battle "in strength, glory, and triumph."[64] To complicate things even more, the scriptures said the slaying would come after the 1260 days of testimony in sackcloth, which Lowman had nicely proved would end around 2016. That seemed to point again towards the last battle of Armageddon, which Edwards felt sure was not the slaying of the witnesses. The tangles were getting greater and greater, and Edwards looked for ways out.

Characteristically, his active mind found several. Since God often provided for a double fulfillment of prophecies, the first being a weaker anticipation of the greater, the rising of the witnesses might be fulfilled in several steps. Although the 1260 days were undoubtedly the "proper time" of the churches' trouble, "this don't hinder but that God, out of great compassion to his church, should in some

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[63] Letter to William McCulloch, in Dwight, ed., Works, I, 214. The same argument appears in the notebook and also the Humble Attempt, Edwards, Works, III, 473.

[64] Dwight, ed., Works, I, 214-15.

respect shorten the days, and...anticipate the appointed great deliverance that shall be at the end of these days." In fact, he had done just that with the Reformation. If that did not seem convincing enough, Edwards was willing to argue that Lowman had perhaps started the 1260 years a bit too late. The Humble Attempt modestly suggested a few alternate possibilities that brought the end of the period back into the eighteenth century.[65] And finally, Edwards pointed out that the original text describing the witnesses' death could be interpreted as occurring throughout the 1260 years instead of after it.[66]

Lowman's commentary probably would have forced Edwards to deal with these problems regardless of the circumstances around him. But Stephen Stein's careful dating of the entries in the apocalyptic notebook indicates that Edwards first began seriously considering the problem of the witnesses sometime in 1740, as the Awakening was spreading across New England.[67] We may reasonably suppose that the increasing showers of grace strengthened his conviction that the church would never wholly sink into darkness, and that God indeed might be shortening the time of the 1260 days. Certainly his intensive study of the problem provided a firmer theoretical base than most ministers had for their hopes that the revival

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[65]Stein, "Notes," II, 236; Edwards, Works, III, 482 ff.

[66]Edwards Works, III, 481. Here he followed Lowman, who in turn depended on Daubuz.

[67]Stein, "Notes," 132.

was "the dawning, or at least, a prelude of that glorious work of God, so often foretold in Scripture." And when the Awakening seemed to falter, the Humble Attempt again proved that Edwards' hope lay in a gradual fulfillment of the prophecies through a revival of prayer. The union resulting from it "will gradually spread more and more, and increase to greater degrees, with which at length will gradually be introduced a revival of religion," until finally "the awakening reaches those that are in the highest stations, and until whole nations be awakened...."[68]

Edwards even offered (with great diffidence) a more detailed scenario of this gradual fall. The sixth vial, he suggested, was meant to dry up the income and supplies of the papal state; and that was proceeding on apace.[69] Meanwhile, even if God did not greatly shorten the time, much remained to be done. Suppose one allowed half a century to get the protestant world peaceably united, and another fifty years to win over the Catholics. Add to that another century to take care of the Mohammedans and Jews, and the last hundred to enlighten the heathen and stamp out vice and recalcitrant enemies. Even if that were not the exact order of accomplishment, the enormity of the task indicated that it could hardly be finished "at one stroke." The great event undoubtedly

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[68] Edwards, Works, III, 313, 432-33.

[69] Edwards kept a list of events in his notebook pointing to such an accomplishment; Stein, "Notes," II, 321-79.

would be brought about "by a gradual progress of religion."[70]

Without a doubt, then, Edwards thought things were gradually getting better and better. Yet another reading of the same documents can provide enough cautious and gloomy prognostics to make historians skeptical about taking any of Edwards' predictions seriously. When he began to correspond with William McCulloch, he relayed the usual hopes for the beginning of something vastly greater; and it was this sentiment which elicited McCulloch's warning (printed in The Christian History) about "more general and formidable trials" yet to come. Edwards' response was to deny that he had ever meant to say the church would be free of troubles, and that "there would probably be many sore conflicts and terrible convulsions, and many changes, revivings and intermissions, and returns of dark clouds, and threatening appearances" before the final victory. The battle of Armageddon might not result in defeat for the church, but there would still be "a great and mighty struggle between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of Satan, attended with the greatest and most extensive convulsions and commotion, that ever were upon the face of the earth, wherein doubtless many particular christians will suffer, and perhaps some parts of the Church."[71]

The Humble Attempt repeated the litany that the last battle would be "the most violent struggle of Satan," the

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[70]Edwards, Works, III, 493.

[71]Dwight, ed., Works, I, 214.

"most general commotion that ever was in the world," and the "greatest conflict" ever. For it seemed obvious to Edwards that the whole history of redemption led up to this last climactic act. To accomplish it, the whole world was "groaning and travailing in pain," like a woman in labor. Thus the Scriptures painted "the last struggles and changes that shall immediately precede this event, as being the greatest of all; as the last pangs of a woman in travail are the most violent."[72] Perhaps the supreme irony of the whole treatise was Edwards' argument that the slaying of the witnesses could not be assigned to the future because the triumphant battle of Armageddon would then have to be interpreted as the resurrection of the witnesses. That could not be the case because the witnesses arose only three years after their death, and the battle of Armageddon was

> an event which, with its circumstances, must take up much time. There is vast preparation made for it by the church's enemies: the devils, in order to stir men up, and gather them together, to this battle...go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to propagate various kinds of delusions, far and wide, all over the world.... [Scriptures show they should engage the church] with vastly greater preparation, strength, and violence than before, and should wage war with them with the mightiest army that ever was gathered against the church, and in the greatest battle that ever was fought....[73]

The obvious conclusion to be drawn from all of this is that Edwards was the master of a quick working and voluble tongue: able to paint with glowing optimism the coming mil-

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[72] Edwards, Works, III, 482, 501, 450-51.

[73] Ibid., p. 478.

lennium while still reassuring his more pessimistic colleagues that plenty enough trouble remained to suit them. Obvious, except that we know this combination of gloom and hope was central to the entire millennial rhetoric; that things might be getting better and better, but the whole creation was groaning and travailing in the process; that God reclaimed his people the way he reclaimed individuals, through the process of sanctification through humiliation. Edwards was conscious that his new theories might be interpreted as a threat to that truism, and acknowledged the specific parallel. It might be objected, he wrote in his Notebook, that generally before God delivered his people in any remarkable way, he had them "reduced to the greatest, their distress [is] the most," just as he did "before the conversion, salvation and comfort of a particular soul. And God's dealings with his church are observably parallel with his dealings with particular souls." Similarly, Christ's most extreme sufferings were the last ones, and just before his resurrection.[74]

Edwards had three answers to this objection, and each deserves careful consideration. The first admitted that God commonly brought deliverance to a people when they were at "the height of their calamity." But Edwards suggested that after this had happened there was often a space which intervened before the final salvation, just as there was with individual believers. "Most commonly the first comforts, given

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[74]Stein, "Notes," II, 240.

at the very time of a sinner's conversion, are not so great as follow afterwards. And often great conflicts and troubles intervene." So it was throughout salvation history. Jesus, although at his lowest during the crucifixion, was not totally delivered at the resurrection, but had to wait for the ascension to achieve complete glory. The persecutions before Constantine's times were the greatest, but they abated about ten years before the Christian emperor took the throne.[75] Edwards' tack here was to accept the model of conversion, emphasize the ups and downs which were part of the perseverance following a believer's initial deliverance, and in that way align the model more closely with his own emphases.

That reply indicated some change in perspective, but Edwards' second response made it clear the change was hardly radical. The Revelation predicted that the witnesses would be slain by antichrist, something that would not happen at Armageddon. But that did not mean that the church of God would not "suffer extreme oppression and be brought very low" just before the last battle—only that the distress would come "not directly by the power of Antichrist, but in some other way; yet in general by the things of the same tendency, and all by Satan...." As proof of this, Edwards noted that the Reformation had come after the witnesses' death, and yet the church was "now reduced very low, and to great extremity, through the prevalance of deism, atheism, heresy and profane-

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[75] Ibid., pp. 241, 245-47.

ness."[76] This argument was not a denial of afflictions ahead; merely a question of who would inflict them.

That was because all Edwards' hopes could not erode his underlying belief that affliction—and more importantly its internal correlate, conviction—was an inseparable part of salvation. Edwards recognized that the crucial factor in the process was the internal psychological state, and not the external stimulus. If those proper feelings of abasement and awe, of dependence on God, of guilt under the law, could be achieved in some other way, then the textual question of the witnesses could be solved without endangering the fundamental process of redemption. It was a brilliant insight, but the final argument came out sounding as though Edwards was attempting to have his cake and eat it.

> 'Tis manifest that immediately before that glorious event, the popish powers will collect all their strength.... They shall join hand in hand; the combination will be exceeding strong; their schemes shall be laid very deep; their preparations shall be immense. The devil will assist them to his utmost; all the powers of hell shall be awakened and engaged. Satan will engage other parts of his kingdom of darkness in the world, to engage in the help of the Romish power; strong leagues and alliances shall be entered into. The ends of the earth, as it were, shall be stirred; emissaries shall be most busily and successfully employed in order to the most formidable and vast preparations. They shall be like Pharoah with all the strength of Egypt and his mighty host of chariots and horsemen, all ready for the battle, and in their own imagination sure of success, vaunting in themselves, in their greatly exceeding the people of God in external pomp and power, so that they shall seem as nothing to 'em. They, greatly irritated and enraged, shall come with whetted resolutions of the most merciless cruelties. The appearances will be such as strongly to impress the minds of God's people

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[76] Ibid., pp. 247-48.

> with a sense of their enemies' power and their own comparative weakness, and the greatness of the sufferings intended them, and lively apprehensions of their danger.

And this show of force, with enemies at first beginning "to prevail and exercise their cruelties," would induce the proper feelings of humility and abasement in the faithful, and thus be "as good a preparation for the glorious deliverance" as if Satan's forces had actually triumphed.[77]

It apparently never occurred to Edwards that by letting this heretofore well kept divine secret out of the bag, he would be thwarting God's purpose by raising up a generation of hopeful Christians who knew their triumph at Armageddon was inevitable. That puts the issue facetiously, but the point underneath remains. Edwards was not sensitive to the irony in his rationalizations because he viewed the process of redemption in the same paradoxical manner as his contemporaries. And for their part, they showed no signs of rushing to embrace Edwards' new specific interpretation.[78]

But perhaps the most vivid illustration of the tradi-

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[77] Ibid., pp. 248-49. Edwards also discussed the conversion parallel in a letter to McCulloch, May 12, 1743; Dwight, ed., Works, I, 197.

[78] The only definite agreement I have been able to locate is a letter from John Willison in Scotland, who wrote that he agreed "that Antichrist's fall will be gradual, in the way you explain it" (Dwight, ed., Works, I, 272). McCulloch, as we have seen, did not agree with Edwards. Nor did Aaron Burr, Jonathan Parsons, or even Samuel Hopkins. See Aaron Burr, A Sermon Preached before the Synod of New York (New York, 1756), pp. 21-26; Jonathan Parsons, Sixty Sermons on Various Subjects (Newburyport, 1779), I, 408; Samuel Hopkins, A Treatise on the Millennium (Boston, 1793), pp. 150-53.

tional perspective can be found in the only other detailed analysis of the prophecies published at the time of the Awakening. Robert Fleming's The Fulfilling of the Scriptures was a volume which Edwards himself found useful, even though it had been first published in 1671.[79] Thomas Foxcroft called the Scotsman's treatise a "celebrated Piece" in his preface to the first American edition, and other New Lights agreed with him.[80] In some ways, Fleming's volume seems an unlikely choice for publication in a time of hopes buoyed by unprecedented revivals. Fleming was writing in what he thought was "a dark time." Everywhere, the church was "suffering and afflicted, whilst the whole earth besides seemeth to be at ease." Sinful men were running rampant "whilst the good man doth (alas!) perish." Thus his view of prophecy mirrored Lowman's: scripture predictions were "precious promises" which took the Christian "safe thorow this labyrinth of the world." Only when the millennium itself came would there be "no more need for a Christian to go to a promise and adventure upon it; we shall then no more watch, with the watchman in a dark and stormy night, and hope for the breaking of the day...."[81]

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[79]Robert Fleming, The Fulfilling of the Scriptures (Boston, 1742). See Edwards' citations in Thoughts on the Revival, Yale Works, IV, 307-10, 529.

[80]Fleming, Fulfilling of the Scriptures, Preface. That same year, Samuel Finley recommended it as "very serviceable to the present Age," in Christ Triumphing (Boston, 1742), preface; see also Jonathan Parson's use of it in Sixty Sermons, I, 368.

[81]Fleming, Fulfilling of the Scriptures, xiii, 6.

Fleming used similar rhetoric to embroider the church's assurances. God, after all, had been accomplishing his prophecies throughout history; redemption was a process, "not perfected at once, but...still gradually carrying on." God's clear promises and the beginnings already made showed men that the work could not halt until the final perfect day. In short, Fleming managed to combine the gloomy and hopeful in the usual way. "It may seem strange," he admitted, "how the Church's trouble and strait is oft seen to increase, with the first stirrings of her deliverance"; but that was "indeed a piece of the Lord's way with his Church." Luther had triumphed, and was immediately beset by anabaptists; Edward VI hardly had time to purify his church before Mary Tudor succeeded him. And the Bible was replete with similar examples.[82] The whole treatise, in fact, was written from this "it-may-seem-strange" perspective. That "overclouding and darkness" should appear right after spiritual blessings "would seem a strange piece of providence." That "shakings and commotions" usually attended the coming of the Gospel might "also seem strange, yea, and are ready to make many stumble." But what was rhetorically represented as strange to believers was actually the traditional formula of sanctification through affliction. The Saints' complaint had always been "the Lord's wounding them with the wound of a cruel one."[83]

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[82] Ibid., pp. 6, 173, 155-57.

[83] Ibid., pp. 158, 167-68.

The upshot of this logic was Fleming's belief that things were getting better because events had taken a turn for the worse! Did the forces of antichrist seem to be causing more trouble than ever? This was good news. "For when this party seems now to get up, and begins to move a war, we have sure ground to believe his further falling thereby...." Was the church in a declining and woeful state? This might be unfortunate news if it was just one church on the decline —then there was a chance that particular church might perish. "But since this seems to be a consumption of the whole earth, a matter of lamentation and spreading complaint, through the whole reformed Church, we may look on it as a very promising ground." The modern reader cannot suppress an indulgent smile and the speculation that if Fleming had ever lived to see the thousand years of peace and prosperity, he would have denounced it as the worst setback in the history of the church. The smile vanishes as Fleming almost rises to meet the challenge: Scripture shows, he says, that the church needs to be "thus tossed...a long calm being no less her hazard, than a sharp storm.... Oh how oft hath the Church lost more by a few years peace, than a long continued war!"[84]

No, that is pushing Fleming too far. He was no opponent of the millennium, and we may safely resume our smiles. But of all the available treatises on scripture prophecies, why on earth did Thomas Foxcroft have to pick this one to support the Awakening?

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[84] Ibid., pp. 176, 183, 178.

III

We can answer that in part from what we already know about the temper of previous prophetic expositions. The Puritan apocalyptic tradition was of a piece with a more general conception of the process of salvation. Redemption, whether on an individual or social level, required judgment as well as mercy; demanded a pilgrimage through the valley of the shadow before reaching the millennial heights. That theological tradition was a strong one—at the heart of New England theology—and it would have taken an extremely glorious set of providences to purge the church of that point of view. The Awakenings were indeed glorious; no doubt they inspired in men like Edwards a vision of the beauty of union between God and his people. We might well be tempted to guess that Foxcroft published the Fulfilling of the Scriptures because it was a prophecy made in the blackest night of that dawn which had finally come—except that Foxcroft made it clear that was not at all his purpose. In fact, the tradition Fleming represented was one that fit the needs of the time quite well. The revivals were certainly the most notable event in New England's history of redemption; they were also the most divisive and controversial disturbances the country had seen. Responsible supporters of the Awakening had to deal with both the men who flatly denied that the revivals were a work of God and with the zealots who seemed bent on proving that the opposers were right.

Here was where Fleming was so relevant: he recognized that a period of progress for the Gospel was inevitably accompanied by both opposition and excesses. The pattern Fleming described made it easier to understand that there were two kinds of works going on in the Awakening, one by "the Holy Ghost, in convincing, humbling, and converting Souls; and as evidently, a Work of the Devil, in promoting what tends to blast and ruin that Work."[85] Those who had steeped themselves in Fleming's it-may-seem-strange rhetoric knew that "shakings and commotions" were a part of the Spirit's progress. Thus "this complex State of Things" seemed to Foxcroft a "notable Discovery of the Fulfilling of the Scriptures." Fleming's treatment of affliction and blessings was sure to administer "much Light" in explaining such a "Coincidence of Facts."[86]

Foxcroft was merely commending a truism which many New Lights were already using: the more Satan was chained, the more he raged. That was comforting news indeed for those ministers who found their colleagues attacking them for supporting what seemed obviously a work of God. From Scotland, James Robe wrote New Englanders of the cautions he had taken to keep his own revival above reproach. "I was persuaded, the further Progress this blessed Work should make, the greater Opposition would be made to it; and the more CHRIST

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[85] Foxcroft in ibid., xi. Foxcroft is here quoting another minister of the same opinion.

[86] Ibid.

should triumph, the more Satan would rage, which I now see come to pass." George Whitefield was so well prepared to meet with Satan's efforts that he was surprised when the devil did not oblige him. "I wonder we have no more adversaries," he remarked after preaching to a crowd of thousands in Philadelphia. "By and by, I expect Satan and his emissaries to rage horribly. I endeavored to warn my hearers of it."[87] When Satan's emissaries did raise objections, William Cooper was ready with his own similar warning. "That some entertain prejudices against this work, and others revile and reproach it," did not make it any less a work of God; in fact, "it would else want one mark of its being so; for the spirit of this world, and the Spirit which is of God are contrary the one to the other. I don't wonder, that Satan rages, and shews his rage in some that are under his influence, when his kingdom is so shaken...."[88]

The logic of this argument made it a two-edged sword. Satan had a double strategy of encouraging both opposers and extreme zealots. The faithful were of course comforted to know that opposition was only another proof of the revival's validity. But perhaps the opponents themselves might be won over if they could only be made to see how the devil was setting up the extremists in order to conceal the Awakening's

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[87] Prince Jr., ed., Christian History, I, 51. See also II, 59. George Whitefield's Journals (reprint of the 1905 ed.; Gainsville, Fla., 1969), p. 356.

[88] Yale Works, IV, 222.

true value. When Chauncy objected that some apparent conversions were actually delusions, supporters could point to Fleming's observation that "when there is some remarkable work of God on foot in the land...Satan setteth up some usual counterfeit there of...with a very strange resemblance of the same." "Who can wonder," asked New Lights in their official "Testimony and Advice," "if at such a time as this, Satan should intermingle himself...?"[89]

By the time the "Testimony and Advice" had been signed, the Awakening was already beginning to recede from its spiritual heights. And with the decline came a corresponding reemphasis on the church as a threatened small band waiting for deliverance out of its chastised state. At the beginning of the revivals, Thomas Foxcroft had contrasted the period before as a time when the enemy had come in like a flood; and now Edwards, writing McCulloch in March, 1744, spoke of the present "very melancholy" times in the same terms: "the Enemy has come in like a flood, in various respects, until the deluge has overwhelmed the whole land." It was a day of Satan's triumph—but of course fortunately one of "God's People's Humiliation, which will be better to them in the end than the elevations and raptures."[90] Declension had once again set in.

We should remember that the Humble Attempt was written

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[89]Fleming, Fulfilling of the Scripture, p. 164; Prince Jr., ed., Christian History, I, 162.

[90]Dwight, ed., Works, I, 212.

in this "destitute" and "very low" time; consequently, it had much of the old Jeremiad in it.

> How lamentable is the moral and religious state of these American colonies; of New England in particular! How much is that kind of religion that was professed and much experienced and practised, in the first, and apparently the best times of New England, grown and growing out of credit! What fierce and violent contentions have been of late among ministers and people, about things of a religious nature! How much is the gospel ministry grown into contempt! And the work of the ministry, in many respects, laid under uncommon difficulties, and even in danger of sinking amongst us! How many of our congregations and churches rending in pieces! Church discipline weakened, and ordinances less and less regarded!

The key remedy was of course prayer—particularly prayer "from the dust of Zion." When scripture talked of a world in travail, it meant, at least in part, a "wrestling and agonizing" on the part of faithful petitioners. Christ longed to deliver his church, but he did so only after he heard its cries from "the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs; in a low and obscure state, driven into secret corners."[91]

In focusing on prayer as a central means for enlarging the kingdom, Edwards placed himself in the center of New England's apocalyptic tradition. "These happy Times [of the millennium] are to be ushered in by Prayer," explained Samuel Willard; and Increase Mather concurred.[92] Cotton recommended

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[91] Edwards, Works, III, 458, 454-56.

[92] Willard, Fountain Opened, pp. 125-26. Increase wrote a treatise entirely devoted to the point; A Discourse Concerning Faith and Fervency in Prayer, passim.

a whole spectrum of prayers to help hasten the final days, including "public Supplication, to be maintained by our Churches, in a successive and repeated practice thereof."[93] For that reason, Cotton was quite receptive to a proposal that came to him from London in 1712 similar to the one Edwards received from Scotland thirty-five years later. Cotton's correspondents had agreed to spend an hour each week in prayer "for the Deliverance and Enlargement" of the church; they thought "Public Prayers" were perhaps more effective because of the "Union and Harmony" in them. Cotton liked the proposal, and added it to his already busy schedule of meetings and prayers to hasten the times. "It may be attended with wondrous Consequences," he noted, and proceeded to send around copies of the letter to the religious societies he had already organized—"and so, draw as many of them as may be, into the Agreement."[94]

Edwards' humble attempt and Mather's modest proposal were thus both a part of the greater millennial tradition which provided rhetorics well suited to their times. The Great Awakening no less than the preceding period of declension created disturbing and ambiguous situations which pro-

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[93] Cotton Mather, Things for a Distressed People (Boston, 1696), p. 29. Mather emphasized—like Edwards—the travail and importunity that true prayer required. See A Companion for the Afflicted (Boston, 1701).

[94] The proposal is reprinted in Manierre, ed., The Diary of Cotton Mather for the Year 1712, pp. 115-18; see also pp. 86, 101. Edwards was apparently unaware of the precedent.

phetic thought explained well—nay, even predicted in advance. That was the beauty of the afflictive model of progress: it promised redemption of a sort which the mixed temper of the Awakening could provide. The prophecies, as Sir Isaac would have said, were interpreted by the events. But at this point, our modern cynicism returns. Certainly a momentous upheaval like the Awakening would have produced divisions and contentions even if it had not been interpreted by many as part of the larger history of redemption. But might we not also argue that the millennial perspective itself helped to foster the conditions it predicted? Or that Isaac Newton might better have reversed himself and said the events were interpreted—and shaped—by the prophecies?

This happened most obviously, perhaps, when the grand vision succeeded in clothing smaller events in the raiment of larger ones. We have already seen how the prophecies helped the individual believer to place his own pilgrimage within an immensely larger and more important context. Edwards explained the relationship nicely in his History of the Work of Redemption--itself New England's grandest summary of the plan. The whole design was like a river whose innumerable branches met only at the end of their respective journeys to the sea. Without knowledge of the overall plan which Scripture provided, men would be unable to perceive the direction of the movement, and the different tributaries would most likely appear as a "mere jumble and confusion to us, because of the limitedness of our sight." At close range, they

seemed to be running in all different directions; and even when viewed from a distance, the terrain revealed "innumerable obstacles and impediments in the way to hinder their ever uniting and coming to the ocean, as rocks, and mountains, and the like...."[95] But by keeping the ultimate destiny of the rivers in mind, the bewildered believer could take comfort in the knowledge that God's plan was somehow being fulfilled.

Less able to take comfort, however, were those who ended up being cast as the rocks, mountains and other "impediments." The same grand vision that united the true believer with the forces of light also tended to place the sincere opposer with the forces of darkness; and that was perhaps the greatest paradox of the millennial dream. To see opposition to the revivals as confirmation of their validity because "the more Satan was chained, the more he raged" certainly raised the hopes of uncertain believers; but it also raised the hackles of opposers. The latter suddenly found themselves fitted into a larger than life battle between Christ and Satan: only instead of being humble believers transformed into members of Christ's glorious army, they became emissaries of Satan, or almost as bad, the unwitting dupes he manipulated to block the progress of redemption. When millennialists raised the stakes in their battle and used eschatological rhetoric to help make an ambiguous world clearer, they also created a climate which encouraged a polarization of attitudes.

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[95]Edwards, Works, I, 511.

Conversion, the smallest unit in the pattern of salvation, reinforced in its own way the perspective of the larger historical vision. It too heightened the commitment of the believer to his faith by forcing him to confirm it in the psychological crucible of humiliation, conviction and the new birth. The established morphology painted the end result of conversion as a dramatic reversal in personality: the old sinner by the grace of God made a new man. Of course, the process could be a gradual one, taking a long period of time. And in actuality, many non-churchmembers were strong believers and hardly "sunk in sin" before their new birth—as witness the scrupulous refusal of many to attend communion even in Stoddardean churches. But even though the reality may well have been different from the ideal, the convert's pilgrimage had him starting the journey not as a conscientious man attempting to clarify and strengthen his faith, but as a sleepy worldling blind to the truth and numb to the spirit until the terrors of the law reached him.

If a convert was able to convince himself that his old sins had rendered him incapable of seeing the world in proper perspective, then would it be so difficult to attribute similar motives to men who disagreed with the New Light? John White, a supporter of the Awakening who had long feared the threat of Arminianism, showed how the logic might be used. "You may be confident that your Opinions are right," he told Arminians, "as the Jews were, that Christ was an Impostor.... Yet 'tis with you as it was with them...." White could be so

sure of himself because he too had once been in that sleepy state: "I am able to say, as one said when disputing with Quakers, I was a Quaker before I was a Christian: so I was an Arminian before I was a Christian. But God of his infinite Mercy has brought me off from that unsafe and false way." Thus a "thorow Work of Conversion" was "the most effectual Security against corrupt Principles and Practices," because such a work would remove the scales from a man's eyes. A sinner might think his beliefs were based on sincere convictions; but in truth, "'tis Pride that prompts thereto."[96]

The polarizing effects of the conversion model appear most clearly, of course, in the extremists of the movement. It is easy enough to see the effects James Davenport would create by telling all who disagreed with him that they were still slaves of Satan; or the impression David Brainerd would produce by telling Chauncy Whittelsey that he had no more grace than a chair. And Whitefield's ability to alienate clergy with his injudicious remarks is well known. Any political, religious or social movement is likely to have its radicals who are ready to assign designing and sinful motives to the men who oppose them. What is more interesting is the tendency of the rhetoric of conversion and the larger work of redemption to push even moderates towards antagonistic positions.

Men like Foxcroft, Prince and Edwards were quite aware

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[96] John White, New England's Lamentations (Boston, 1734), pp. 26-29.

of the divisiveness created by a censorious spirit, and they tried to guard against it. When Foxcroft introduced Jonathan Dickinson's discussion of true Scripture doctrine, he noted that although it condemned Arminianism, men with a true "Christian Temper" would realize there were "many good Men of the Arminian Persuasion."[97] Prince inserted a timely injunction in The Christian History on the dangers of Phariseeism, warning both sides in the disputes that "those that most object it to others may be most deeply infected with it themselves." Edwards spoke frankly to Whitefield about the pitfalls of judging others' eternal states too freely, and his works contain many warnings to the "zealous friends of this glorious work of God" to refrain from "managing the controversy with opposers with too much heat and appearance of an angry zeal."[98] Yet for all the good intentions, an unconscious abrasiveness remained; and it can be best seen in the two principal defenses of the revival written by Edwards himself: the Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God and Some Thoughts on the Revival of Religion.

Distinguishing Marks purported to explain to those who had doubts about the revival what exactly constituted such a valid work—how, in effect, errors and excesses could creep

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[97] Dickinson, True Scripture-Doctrine, v-vi. He was immediately attacked by Andrew Croswell for saying this; see the Boston Weekly Post Boy, April 26, 1742; also April 12 and April 19.

[98] Prince Jr., ed., Christian History, I, 136; Yale Works, IV, 287.

in and still not blemish the work as a whole. But doubters were not likely to be encouraged by William Cooper's prefatory comments about Satan's opposition to the revival through "some that are under his influence." Cooper thought that the "malignity" of some of the objectors approached "the unpardonable sin"; and he suggested that if anyone remained unconvinced after reading Edwards' arguments, the least they could do was remain silent, "and stop their oppositions, lest haply they should be found even to fight against God." For it was God's plan of redemption that was being opposed: Edwards made that clear. Anyone who had studied the overall design would see too many parallels to deny that. When Christ first appeared on earth, the Jews opposed him; now when he appeared in the spirit, it was "no wonder at all" that men reviled the work—"yea, it would be a wonder if it should be otherwise." Just as God was provoked by the Jews who refused to acknowledge Christ, so now was he likely to move in wrath against those who failed to acknowledge him in this work, "notwithstanding what they may plead of the great stumbling blocks that are in the way.... The teachers of the Jewish church found innumerable stumbling blocks, that were to them insuperable...."[99]

So Charles Chauncy and his ilk found themselves labelled as Pharisees of the worst sort; men who would not even recognize Christ. Even "silent ministers" who thought it

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[99]Yale Works, IV, 222-24; 271-72.

best not to commit themselves either way actually stood "in the way of the work." And what added insult to injury was the conversion psychology: the Jews "were assured that they had just cause for their scruples," just as present day opposers were. But the discerning of the truth depended on having the right spiritual principles within. That was precisely why God allowed so many stumbling blocks in his whole design. "'Tis with Christ's works as it was with his parables: things that are difficult to men's dark minds are ordered of purpose, for the trial of persons' dispositions and spiritual sense, and that persons of corrupt minds, and of an unbelieving, perverse, caviling spirit, seeing might see and not understand." The eschatological consequence was clear: many who had ostensibly prayed for "that glorious reformation spoken of in Scripture" knew no more of what they wished for than the Jews did when they prayed for the coming of Christ.[100]

The same rhetoric accompanied the Thoughts on the Revival. The essay's entire middle section was devoted to demonstrating the obligation of supporting the work, and "the Danger of the Contrary." And Edwards made it clear, just as John had in his advice to the church of Laodicea (Rev. 3) that at a time like the present "there is no such thing as being neuters; there is a necessity of being either for or against the king that then gloriously appears...." The grand vision of redemption was once again escalating the conse-

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[100] Ibid., pp. 273-74.

quences of the whole debate, and it was used quite consciously for that purpose. The section often quoted by historians about Edwards' hopes for America as the site for the dawning glorious work stands right in the midst of this plea to opposers. "I have thus long insisted on this point," Edwards explained, "because if these things are so, it greatly manifests how much it behooves us to encourage and promote this work, and how dangerous it will be to forbear to do so."[101]

Edwards then proceeded to show how dangerous it would be for anyone in New England—"rulers, ministers and people, high and low, rich and poor, old and young"—to oppose the work. The technique of exhortation for each group was similar, and illustrated nicely in his warning to authors who publicly discussed the revivals. Scripture provided the ground for the warning: in this case the maxim in Judges that "they that handle the pen of the writer" would come to the help of the Lord. Edwards' next step was to use typology and eschatology to apply that scripture to his own times, in a way that magnified the consequences of everyday actions. Since these words in scripture

> were indited by a Spirit, that had a perfect view of all events to the end of the world, and had a special eye in this song, to that great event of the deliverance of God's church, in the latter days, of which this deliverance of Israel was a type, it is not unlikely that they have respect to authors, those that should fight against the kingdom of Satan, with their pens.

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[101] Edwards, Works, III, 310, 316; see pp. 313-16 for the speculations about America.

The final step in the process was to apply the passage to those who opposed the revivals, which Edwards did in a rather ominous way:

> Those therefore that publish pamphlets, to the disadvantage of this work, and tending either directly or indirectly to bring it under suspicion, and to discourage or hinder it, would do well thoroughly to consider whether this be not indeed the work of God; and whether if it be, it is not likely that God will go forth as fire, to consume all that stands in his way, and so burn up those pamphlets; and whether there be no danger that the fire that is kindled in them, will scorch the authors.[102]

Edwards certainly meant well in all of this. He wanted only to promote a more perfect harmony and union among believers. If doubters would just stop printing objections, the millennial world everyone longed for might come more quickly. But doubters did not stop doubting, and part of the reason was the unconscious offensiveness of such rhetoric. Men did not like being told, however charitably, that they were opposing Christ's work because "it touches them, in something that is dear to their carnal minds; and because they see the tendency of it is to cross their pride, and deprive them of the object of their lusts."[103] Ironically, the humble attempts at union failed in part because they could too easily become subtle but nonetheless disruptive exercises in spiritual pride.

The millennial dream, then, both made and unmade the hopes of those who welcomed the Awakening. Made the hopes

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[102] Ibid., pp. 328, 331.

[103] Ibid., p. 331.

not only because the revivals seemed like foretastes of the glorious gospel promises, but also because the afflictive model of progress explained the divisive aspects of the religious turmoil as an inevitable and in some ways beneficial part of the road to salvation. It told believers—as the Revelation had been telling them for many centuries—that God sanctified his saints by such oppositions; that deliverance came for the church as it came for individual believers: out of a struggle with the forces of darkness. In the midst of that struggle, scripture promises helped to explain where the many streams were flowing, where the great work was tending—especially when the events themselves did not always give sufficient signs.

And here was where the hopes were unmade. For the very act of incorporating small skirmishes into the grand drama created divisions even as it predicted them; irritated opposers even as it reassured the faithful. The conversion rhetoric which assumed true believers could discern the signs of the times also assumed that it was carnal pride which prompted opposition. Unfortunately, Robert Fleming may have judged human nature correctly when he remarked that the church had lost more ground "by a few years peace, than [by] a long continued war." But even more unfortunately, the millennial rhetoric discouraged an emotional climate where his proposition could be tested.

Chapter 5

HISTORY AS THEODICY

This study began by confessing that for modern readers, New Englanders' writings on the prophecies often seem obscure and strange. The rest of the dissertation has attempted to make some sense of this unfamiliar millennial logic by examining the recurring themes which united the welter of confusing prophetic speculations. Perhaps we would do well to review our conclusions before proceeding further.

To begin with, the Revelation itself was written for a definite purpose. John set down his vivid visions because they helped to explain the church's persecutions at the hands of Rome. Many Christians had been expecting the imminent return of their saviour; instead they found themselves subject to an imperial rule which seemed to demonstrate that it was men like Domitian, and not Christ, who held the keys to the worldly kingdom. The Revelation explained that God's plan had not been thwarted. It maintained that the suffering of the righteous was an essential part in the divine drama, and that only after a period of terrible trials would Christ come to reign for a thousand years. John's visions comforted and strengthened Christians who had been wavering.

It is interesting to notice that the message contained in the Revelation was in one sense precisely the opposite of

what one might expect to find in a "millennial" tract. Those to whom it was originally addressed were indeed expecting an imminent end to the world they knew, and the beginning of a new one ruled by Christ. But the Revelation warned that peace was not coming as soon as many had hoped. In fact, the bulk of the visions had little to say about the final rule of Christ: only six verses in all of the twenty-two chapters dealt directly with the millennial end to the drama. Most of the book was devoted to a history, written by God at the beginning of time and fulfilled by the trials of years to come: the famines, plagues and pestilences sent abroad by the horsemen of the seven seals; the woman's flight into the wilderness; the witnesses' prophesying in sackcloth and ashes. Believers had been hoping for a Christ who would deal immediately with the Caesars of the world; John gave them instead a once and future king. They had been hoping for a millennium which would end their present troubles; John gave them the burden of a once and future history.

Eighteenth century expositors picked up these themes and used them as a framework for interpreting their own times. They had little success in devising a scientific or consistent system of prophetic interpretation, and so continued to disagree about the meaning and order of specific Biblical predictions. But that was natural enough, since everyone admitted the prophecies were meant to be obscure until fulfilled. What everyone could agree about was their general function, which was to support "the faith and constancy of

the church, in every state of affliction."[1] Thus eighteenth century divines followed John's example of measuring their progress towards the millennium in terms of the judgments necessary for redemption, and their sermons reflected the strange litany which combined pessimism with optimism and the gloomy with the hopeful. God used his afflictions as a goldsmith did his hammer: "Knock, knock, knock; knock, knock, knock, to finish the plate: It was to perfect them, not to punish them."[2]

In one sense, then, interpretations of the Revelation functioned merely as theodicies of comfort: explaining God's chastizing of the faithful, and holding out the millennium as a time when the righteous would finally rule on earth as they did in heaven. But by casting that theodicy in the form of a history, and by equating days of progress with days of affliction, divines insured that the millennial rhetoric would be more than a peripheral part of their theology; more than a salve which could be readily forgotten when events took a turn for the better. The bad times were the good times; just as humiliation and conviction were the encouraging and necessary steps on an individual's road to salvation. New Light interpretations of the Great Awakening made this especially clear. The afflictive model of progress was an integral part

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[1]Lowman, Paraphrase on the Revelation, in Patrick, Critical Commentary, IV, 1013.

[2]Ezekiel Cheever made the comment to Samuel Sewall. Sewall, Diary, II, 230.

of New England theology because it shaped history to the pattern of life through death which was at the heart of Christianity—and which was so meticulously elaborated in the Puritan morphology of conversion.

Obviously, the model of millennial logic we have reconstructed assumes that the concerns of history and theodicy were closely related. The purpose of this final chapter is to use that model to illustrate the way prophetic thought functioned in the late 1750's and early 1760's: both as a theodicy which was used to support the more traditional arguments defending God's honor; and as a comforting history which put into perspective the difficult times New England was experiencing. In the first instance, it was the New Lights who capitalized on the history of redemption to defend their heightened conception of God's omnipotence and his wisdom in the permission of sin. In the second case, both Calvinists and liberals seized on the prophetic patterns of salvation to explain the threats posed by the French and Indian War.

I

The supporters of the Great Awakening have been more commonly associated with millennial ideologies than have their opponents the theological liberals, and for several good reasons. The most obvious one is that they wrote more on the subject. Edwards, of course, composed the most out-

standing attempt to place the prophecies in historical perspective: the History of the Work of Redemption. And his two lieutenants, Bellamy and Hopkins, published their own speculations on the Revelation. In contrast, leading liberals gave less explicit attention to the subject. Although Mayhew and Chauncy sometimes discussed eschatology in their sermons, neither offered the press a separate treatise devoted to their theories. Samuel Langdon, a moderate with liberal leanings, did have plans for publishing an extensive commentary on John's visions, but his proposals for the volume elicited few subscriptions, and the project languished until 1791.[3]

New Lights were also attracted to the millennial outlook because it had a natural affinity for the larger concerns of Awakening theology. Most obviously, the hope engendered by the successful revivals led to thoughts of the coming kingdom. But equally important was the ability of the afflictive model of redemption to explain the fierce opposition to the revivals as yet another example of Satan raging even as he was being chained. The last chapter suggested that New

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[3]Langdon's interest in the Revelation can be seen in his sermon, A Rational Explication of St. John's Vision of the two Beasts (Portsmouth, 1774). The proposals for the larger volume are in the Advertisement at the front. The longer commentary is Observations on the Revelation of St. John (Worcester, 1791). Langdon considered himself a moderate Calvinist, but he had been affected by the theology of men like Charles Chauncy and John Taylor more than he might have admitted—as his good friend Ezra Stiles knew. See Shipton, Sibley's Harvard Graduates, X, 508-28; Ezra Stiles, Literay Diary, ed. Henry M. Dexter (New York, 1901), II, 190-92.

Lights accepted this version of history so readily partly because it was a grander elaboration of the new birth at the heart of the revivals. But the history of redemption also reinforced another central thrust of Awakening theology: the reassertion of God's sovereignty. This relationship is the focus of the present discussion.

The stress on conversion was itself a manifestation of the emphasis on sovereignty. A truly thorough work of conviction could come only when a sinner perceived his own unrighteousness in relation to the overwhelming perfection, power and justice of God. Furthermore, salvation was possible only when the sinner realized that human ability counted for naught in the process. God demanded faith, but only he had the power to provide it. When Arminians argued that a man could act as a free moral agent in choosing whether or not to believe the gospel, New Lights accused them of robbing God of his sovereign power; leaving him dependent on the actions of men. Liberals retorted that Calvinists were the ones who had insulted the Deity, by exalting omnipotence at the expense of goodness. If human actions were so totally dependent on the divine will, then was not God directly responsible for all the moral evil loose in the world? That, at least, was what liberals saw as the logical extension of the argument; and to answer the charge, New Lights turned to the prophecies as well as to the more traditional philosophical arguments.

Before examining the Calvinist position more closely,

we should stop to eliminate one possible confusion. Although Old and New Lights debated the extent of God's responsibility for evil in the world, both sides agreed that the misfortunes arising out of natural disasters were properly attributed to the divine will. Thus Jonathan Mayhew began his sermon on the Boston fire of 1760 by quoting the prophet Amos: "Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" Reason as well as scripture, he said, showed that God was the architect of all events in the world, "the denial of which must terminate, not merely in the denial of a universal superintending providence, but of one or other of God's attributes; either his omniscience, or his omnipotence, if not of both...." But Mayhew was quick to point out that Amos was not talking about "moral evil, or sin; but only natural, viz. pain, affliction and calamity." To conceive of God's "overruling providence, as to make him the author, or approver, of men's sinful actions" would be going too far: "blaspheming God, under the shew and appearance of doing honor to him." And Mayhew suggested that there were some ministers "who could not perhaps easily acquit themselves of this charge...."[4]

It was the question of moral evil, then, on which Calvinists and liberals parted; and by the time Mayhew delivered his sermon in 1760, the debate had raged long enough to insure that his audience understood well his allusions. The polemical controversy opened in 1757 when Samuel Webster pub-

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[4]Jonathan Mayhew, God's Hand and Providence to be religiously acknowledged... (Boston, 1760), pp. 7-11.

lished an imaginary Winter Evening's Conversation between a minister and several parishioners on the subject of original sin.[5] Webster denied that any man was liable to damnation simply because he had sinned in Adam's fall, and used a number of emotional arguments to plead his case. The most striking painted the lurid consequences of the doctrine for infants who had died shortly after birth. Obviously, mere babes were incapable of repentance, and thus doomed to hell on account of Adam's imputed sins. "How can you reconcile it to the goodness, the holiness or the justice of God," asked Webster's minister,

> to make them heirs of hell, and send them into the world only to breathe and die, and then take them away to hell, or even send them to hell from their mother's womb before even they have seen the light of life? What! make them first to open their eyes in torments, and all this for a sin which certainly they had no hand in....

That sort of doctrine naturally led men "into very dishonorable thoughts of God." In effect, some Christians were "guilty of holding what even heathen would blush at, and all the world, have ever accounted the highest blasphemy, namely, that God is the author of sin."[6]

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[5]Samuel Webster, A Winter Evening's Conversation (2nd ed.; New Haven, 1757). The second edition has an appendix added by a Connecticut sympathizer. Webster later cautioned that this did not necessarily reflect his own views. The debate over original sin had been going on for some time already in England, with some rumblings in New England as well. But Webster's tract was the first frontal attack issued in the colonies. For more details, see H. Shelton Smith, Changing Conceptions of Original Sin (New York, 1955); and Joseph Haroutunian, Piety Versus Moralism (New York, 1932).

[6]Webster, Winter Evening's Conversation, pp. 5-6, 24.

Despite these hard words, Webster attempted to downplay his differences with the Calvinists. Most Christians shared the same fundamental doctrines, he said; it was only minor issues like original sin which prompted disagreement. And so when Peter Clark attacked the Winter Evening's Conversation, Webster replied that he and Clark were not as far apart as the latter might think. The main difference of opinion was over whether innocent children could be sent to hell; and Clark too was unwilling to say that they could. Why the great argument?[7] This conciliatory stance may have been good debating policy, but it seriously underestimated the gap between the liberal and Calvinist positions. Webster assumed that if infants were not to be sent to hell, it followed that they remained sinless until they became "moral agents." Similarly, he argued that it made no sense to say that all men were guilty because they were "in" Adam when he sinned. Even supposing that "we were in the loins of our father Adam, soul and body at that time; I would ask whether any would venture to say we were moral agents at that time, so as to be accountable for our actions. Few, I believe will be so absurd to assert it."[8] Webster naturally assumed that God would be unjust to hold men accountable for sins which

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[7] Ibid., pp. 3-4. Clark's reply was The Scripture Doctrine of Original Sin, stated and defended, in a Summer Morning's Conversation (Boston, 1758). Webster also minimizes his differences throughout The Winter Evening's Conversation Vindicated (Boston, 1769).

[8] Webster, Winter Evening's Conversation, pp. 6, 9.

they did not commit as free moral agents.

But that meant Adam's original sin was merely the tip of the iceberg. Below lay the countless other transgressions men had perpetrated regardless of what they inherited from Adam. God could be cleared of all responsibility for these if it was assumed that men possessed self-determining wills unconstrained by any prior necessary causes. Under this scheme, a man was properly responsible for his own sins; it was the imputed ones that were difficult to justify. But Calvinists assumed, as Edwards reiterated in his Enquiry into the Freedom of the Will, that it was nonsense to talk of a self-determining will. God had foreknowledge of men's decisions, and he had that foreknowledge because he knew the causes which necessarily led men to choose as they did. Edwards thus asserted that free will was not incompatible with necessity. To liberals, this only compounded the problem. Now it seemed that Calvinists had made God the author of all the sins of the world, not just those imputed by Adam's fall.

The gap between the two viewpoints of God's omnipotence and his consequent moral responsibility was obviously larger than Webster admitted. The specific debate over original sin continued,[9] but both Joseph Bellamy and Samuel Hop-

[9]Edwards' treatise on the subject, though not written for the controversy, appeared in 1757; Charles Chauncy also entered the lists with a short discussion. Jonathan Edwards, The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin, Yale Works III; Charles Chauncy, The Opinion of one that has perused the Summer Morning's Conversation (Boston, 1759). Clyde Holbrook discusses the controversy at greater length in his Introduction to Edwards' Original Sin.

kins evidently thought the question raised larger issues which deserved an airing. As a result, Bellamy issued a substantial collection of sermons written on the general theme of "the Wisdom of God in the Permission of Sin"; he also chose to include a sermon on the divinity of Christ and another—because he considered it relevant to the general topic—on the millennium. Samuel Hopkins followed suit the next year with Sin, Thro Divine Interposition, An Advantage to the Universe.[10] Both men were disturbed to hear many people making the assumption that "'If God foreordained whatsoever comes to pass, then he foreordained Sin.' As though," continued Bellamy, "it were evidently the greatest Absurdity in Nature, to suppose, that God really thought it best in the whole, that Sin should ever exist in the World he had made." But he and Hopkins knew there was ample evidence to prove that all the sin and misery in the universe was "for the general Good of the Whole" and would "answer some good End that shall much more than counter-balance the Evil...."[11] That evidence could be found by anyone who took the trouble to study any part of the history of redemption.

That, of course, is the phrase Edwards chose to de-

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[10]Joseph Bellamy, Sermons upon the Following Subjects (Boston, 1758). This was issued separately from his more specific attack on Webster's tract published the same year, A Letter to the Rev. Author of the Winter Evening's Conversation (Boston, 1758). Samuel Hopkins, Sin, Thro Divine Interposition (Boston, 1759).

[11]Bellamy, Sermons upon the Following Subjects, iii; Hopkins, Sin, i.

scribe his own study of the prophecies, and perhaps it was not entirely a coincidence that he hoped to spend more time on the subject in 1757 and 1758, when "the prevailing errors of the present day" were at such a height.[12] Edwards' project, had he ever completed it, would undoubtedly have been less polemical than either Bellamy's or Hopkins' tracts of 1758-59, but his two disciples at least shared with him the same broad perspective which united eschatology—the doctrine of "last things"—with the long span of history which preceded it. Edwards thus considered his proposed project to be "a body of divinity in an entire new method," and not simply another exposition of the prophecies. New, because it was

> thrown into the form of a history; considering the affair of Christian Theology, as the whole of it, in each part, stands in reference to the great work of redemption by Jesus Christ; which I suppose to be, of all others, the grand design of God and the summum and ultimum of all the divine operations and decrees; particularly considering all parts of the grand scheme, in their historical order.—The order of their existence, or their being brought forth to view, in the course of divine dispensations, or the wonderful series of successive acts and events; beginning from eternity, and descending from thence to the great work and successive dispensations of the infinitely wise God, in time, considering the chief events coming to pass in the church of God, and revolutions in the world of mankind, affecting the state of the church and the affair of redemption, which we have an account of in history or prophecy; till at last, we come to the general resurrection, last judgment, and consummation of all things; when it shall be said, <u>It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End.</u> ... This history will be carried on with regard to all three worlds, heaven, earth and hell; considering the connected, successive events and alterations in each, so far as the scriptures give any light; introducing

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[12] Dwight, ed., <u>Works</u>, I, 569.

> all parts of divinity in that order which is most scriptural and most natural; a method which appears to me the most beautiful and entertaining, wherein every divine doctrine will appear to the greatest advantage, in the brightest light, in the most striking manner, shewing the admirable contexture and harmony of the whole.[13]

Bellamy and Hopkins took the bringing of good out of evil as the central and recurring pattern exhibited in that "harmony of the whole," and in that way used the history of redemption as a theodicy which demonstrated how admirably evil had been incorporated into the divine plan. The Bible contained "an authentick History of the Conduct of the Deity, for a long Series of many hundred Years," said Bellamy, echoing Edwards, "and by prophetic Representations, opens to our View Things yet to come to pass, as far down as to the End of the World." Such a book was obviously the place to come in order to "form all our Notions of God's moral Perfections." Furthermore, since the whole plan of salvation was "harmonious and consistent," understanding one part of the drama would make it easier to fathom the entire design. "So that if we can see the Wisdom of God in the Permission of Sin in some instances," reasoned Bellamy, "we may justly argue to his Wisdom in his whole grand Scheme." Hopkins agreed. If scripture had shown that God had overruled evil in some instances, "why may he not, yea, why will he not, in every instance?"[14]

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[13] Ibid., pp. 569-70.

[14] Bellamy, Sermons, pp. 122, 104; Hopkins, Sin, p. 8.

The uniformity of God's plan thus provided the rationale for a double edged theodicy. In the first place, it showed that God was not at all dishonored by being held responsible for permitting sin—that was the reason for the existence of the history of redemption, which reflected his glory more than any sinless world ever could. In the second place, once the uniformity of the pattern was granted, the especially difficult parts of the church's history could be accepted even if not understood completely. And that was particularly important, since the present seemed like one of those difficult spots. Bellamy published his sermons at a time "when the State of the World and of the Church appears so exceeding gloomy and dark, and still darker times are by many expected...." The past and future history contained in the Bible would "afford abundant Support, let the present Storm rise ever so high and the Times grow ever so dark."[15]

So Bellamy and Hopkins began their recitation of history: scripture examples of the pattern of light out of dark we have already seen was so much a part of prophetic rhetoric. They held up the example of the Israelites being delivered out of Egypt, where God permitted soldiers to slay the first born males in order that the Hebrews could be weaned from the idols and pleasures of Egypt, and where he permitted Pharoah to tyrannize the chosen people, in order that they would be forced to cross the wilderness to the land of Canaan.

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[15]Bellamy, Sermons, vi.

The obvious moral of these stories was that the faithful should bear up in difficult times, for "if these Dispensations of divine Providence...appeared [to Moses] so full of Divine Beauty, Wisdom and Glory; how know we that God's whole Plan of Government, how Dark soever it may appear to a revolted World, under God's displeasure, may to Saints and Angels...appear perfect in Wisdom."[16] Other examples followed: Joseph being sold as a slave into Egypt so he could be "raised to the highest Advancement" ("Nothing further was needful, than for God not to hinder Joseph's Brethren, and they would sell him—not to hinder Potiphar's Wife, and she would cast him into Prison...."); the Jews refusing to believe in Christ so that the Gentiles might be saved; and of course, Jesus being put to death so that he might rise from the dead.[17] And since the pattern of redemption was uniform, the same processes were currently at work. The church could be delivered from the mystical Babylon just as surely as Israel had been freed from the original one.[18]

Jonathan Parsons, another New Light, expressed the same unified view of history in a sermon which he may well have delivered around the time Hopkins and Bellamy were writing their own theodicies.[19] Parsons noted the scriptures

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[16] Ibid., pp. 78-79, 85.

[17] Ibid., p. 98; Hopkins, Sin, pp. 5-8.

[18] Bellamy, Sermons, p. 104.

[19] Jonathan Parsons, "God's dispensations, at times, unsearchable," in Sixty Sermons on Various Subjects (2 vols.;

advised the faithful to observe and respect the divine government of the world; "but when we view it, there appears such a mixture of light and darkness, that we are non-plus'd, and know not what to say or what to conclude." The answer, as usual, could be found in the Bible stories which demonstrated that when God promised his people something, events often seemed to take a step backwards—precisely the opposite of what the faithful might hope. Parsons pointed out (quite rightly) that Robert Fleming had made the same connection between light and darkness in his expositions of the prophecies which had been re-issued in New England during the Awakening.[20]

If the pattern of light rising out of darkness was a consistent one in the Bible, then the confusing signs of the present were easily enough explained. Satan was indeed stirring, and would "probably, soon assemble a great army to mar the prosperity of the church for a short time." But this was in many ways hopeful, since the greatest deliverance in history would come the way the others had. "When the enemies of

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Newburyport, 1779), I, 358-408. Since these sermons are in a collection published posthumously, it is impossible to determine when this one was preached. However internal evidence suggests that the late 1750's may have been the time. In another set of sermons, published in 1756, Parsons warned that a great event was "nigh at hand"; that "terrible things in righteousness" would precede it; and that indeed there had already been some signs (Good News from a Far Country [Portsmouth, 1756], p. 168). In the sermon on God's dispensations, he also said there were "evident presages of a dreadful storm coming upon church and state" (p. 380). In any case, his concerns were quite similar to those of Hopkins and Bellamy.

[20] Parsons, Sixty Sermons, pp. 363-68. Fleming's work is discussed above, Chapter 4.

the church have got to the height, the year of the redeemed will come. When the church is in a forsaken condition, and begins to say her wound is incurable, then God says...I will restore health unto thee." This may have been cheer of a dubious sort, but it was the best Parsons could offer. He was convinced the witnesses had not been slain, and a time of extensive trouble lay ahead. He refused to say whether "the present clouds that are spread over church and state, are not to rise from one degree of darkness to another, until it is most terrible and universal darkness" or whether the present darkness would "vanish away, and the light break in with great glory, before the darkest day"; but either gloomy alternative would be consistent with God's grand plan.[21]

It is against this backdrop of God's wisdom in the permission of sin that we must view Joseph Bellamy's sermon on the millennium. Bellamy had read some of the major English expositions of the prophecies, but his ideas on the subject were not original, nor did he take much time to elaborate on them. A footnote and a few pages of text in the sermon indicates that he followed Edwards in relying on Moses Lowman, and thus interpreted the first resurrection symbolically.[22] The millennium would be a time of peace for the

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[21]Parsons, Sixty Sermons, pp. 379-80, 407-08, 388. For another sermon which develops these same patterns, although not in an eschatological context, see No. 46, "God's antient dispensations towards his people designed for future improvement of his Church," pp. 488 ff.

[22]Bellamy, Sermons, p. 52n. He also consulted and quoted Charles Daubuz, however, who interpreted the first resurrection literally.

church, but not an unearthly paradise. If some of its inhabitants remained unconverted, they would be "so small a Number, and so feeble...that they shall neither dare, nor be able to disturb the Peace of Christ's Kingdom." Similarly, he agreed with Lowman that the 1260 days of the witnesses should be counted from the time the Pope was constituted a temporal prince in 756. That put antichrist's fall around 2016, although his descent would be gradual, just as his rise had been.[23] But Bellamy's prime concern was not the nature of the millennium or the details of its arrival. He was interested more in using the thousand years as a comforting vision which nicely offset the history of woes which preceded it.

The opening of the sermon made that clear. Bellamy explained that the Bible was called "the good man's book" because it was designed to help the saint understand the situation he was always finding himself in. That situation (as we have already learned from our acquaintance with prophetic rhetoric) could be most succinctly characterized as Down and Out.[24] Consequently, the Bible was "widely adapted to ease the good Man's pained Heart, and afford consolation in the most interesting and important point; as it gives the strongest Assurances that the Cause of Vertue shall finally prevail." God had comforted his embattled church throughout

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[23] Ibid., pp. 52n, 54.

[24] Ibid., pp. 44-45. Bellamy's description of the situation was of course more expansive, but it amounted to the same thing.

history with promises of deliverance, and the millennium was simply the last and greatest of these. Just as the Jews would have been grief-stricken in Babylon had it not been for God's promises to them, "how insupportable" would have been the sadness of the church

> thro' the long, dark, cruel reign of mystical Babylon, while they beheld Error and Wickedness universally prevail, Satan getting his Will in almost every Thing, and to Appearance no signs of better Times, but all Things wearing a dreadful Aspect before their Eyes; how great their Grief; how sinking their Discouragements, how almost insuperable their Temptations to apostatize, and forsake a Course that Heaven seemed to forsake, had not the Day of Deliverance been expressly foretold....

And now, as the world approached the end of that mystical reign, the saints should once again trust in the divine predictions. Bellamy used one of the standard rhetorical constructions of prophetic expositions to hammer home his point:

> And, what if Mankind are ever so estranged from God? And what if they are ever so averse to Reconciliation? And what if Satan reigns in the Courts of Princes, in the Councils of the Clergy, as well as in the Cottages of the Poor? And what if even the whole World in a Manner, lies in Wickedness? so that a general Conflagration might rather be expected, as it is so eminently deserved;—are these Things any Bar in the Way?[25]

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[25] Ibid., pp. 44, 45, 57. This "What if..." rhetoric is out of the same mold as some of the maxims described already in Chapter 4 ("the more Satan is chained...," etc.) which were standard ways of explaining the combination of light and dark in the prophecies. Compare Bellamy's questions with a similar set by Jonathan Mayhew: "What tho' you see iniquity abound, which may perhaps bring sore calamities upon us?... What tho' treacherous and barbarous nations are now ravaging our borders and laying waste our country? What tho' you hear of wars, of earthquakes and inundations in divers places... What tho' the idolatrous corrupters of christianity, or mystical Babylon, should long triumph?" Etc. etc. etc. "Still you know, that the Lord God Almighty, the King of Saints reigneth." Mayhew, A Discourse on Rev. XV:3-4, p. 69.

All this rhetoric—examples of which could be multiplied to the point of exhaustion—indicates how much Bellamy used the history of redemption as a theodicy of comfort. But perhaps the quaintest and most striking demonstration of that concern was the minister's brief foray into the area of millennial demographics.

Bellamy was aware of the numerous scripture passages which suggested that only a small proportion of mankind would be saved. "Many are called but few are chosen" was one; "Straight is the way and narrow the gate" another. Yet Bellamy thought that perhaps these sayings were meant to be applied only to the times preceding the long era of peace and prosperity. If the millennium was to be as full of saints as he hoped, then possibly the majority of mankind would be saved after all! Some ministers, Thomas Prince among them, had suggested that the thousand years mentioned in the Revelation might actually stand for 360,000 years, since the 1260 days of the witnesses and other prophetic numbers had been calculated on the assumption that a day signified a year. In that case, the total number of saints would easily surpass the number of sinners sent to hell.[26] But even if the millennium were only to last for the shorter period, Bellamy thought he could prove that the number of inhabitants would be large enough to easily overbalance the number of damned from earlier years. It was not the sort of population study

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[26]Bellamy does not mention Prince by name, but Samuel Sewall had noted Prince's theory. See above, Chapter 3.

that Ben Franklin might undertake, but to Bellamy, it had infinitely greater significance.[27]

New Englanders, as everyone knew, were doubling at the rate of once every twenty five years, and the Hebrews had done the same at the astounding pace of once every fourteen while they were in Egypt. Thus it would be "moderate" to assume a doubling rate of once every fifty years for the inhabitants of the millennial world, particularly since pestilence, famine and other destroying judgments would be absent. In that case, the population would double itself twenty times over the whole thousand years; for every man at the beginning of the millennium, there would be two in fifty years, four in 100 years, and so on. Bellamy computed the results in a table, as indicated to the left, and discovered there would be over a million people living in the last fifty year span for every person who had lived at the beginning—not to mention a sum total of 2,097,150 souls living over the entire thousand year period for every one person living at the time the reign commenced.

1	2
2	4
3	8
4	16
5	32
6	64
7	128
8	256
9	512
10	1,024
11	2,048
12	4,096
13	8,192
14	16,384
15	37,768
16	65,536
17	131,072
18	262,144
19	524,288
20	1,048,576
Sum TOTAL	2,097,150

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[27]The material in this paragraph as well as the description of the millennial computations which follow, can be found in Bellamy, Sermons, pp. 62-66.

Bellamy further supposed that the population throughout the 6,000 years before the millennium always remained equal to the number at the beginning of that period—a generous assumption. And he estimated that the population changed completely once every fifty years. That would mean (dividing 6,000 by 50) that 120 people had lived in the previous history of the world for every one person alive at the beginning of the millennium. The rest of the figuring seemed to be simple logic:

> Suppose all before the Millennium lost [i.e. damned] = 120
> Suppose all in the Millennium saved = 2,097,150
> Then 120 : 2,097,150 :: 1 : 17,456 - 40/120 Q.E.D.

In other words, for every soul lost before the thousand years, over seventeen thousand would be saved afterwards!

The precise ratio of 1 to 17,456 and 40/120 of a soul, followed by a confident Q.E.D., make an amusing end to the string of calculations, but it should not obscure the point of Bellamy's arithmetic. He freely admitted that God had not revealed the exact proportions of saved to damned, and that his calculations were merely an indication of what was possible. What the faithful should remember was that "the holy Scriptures encourage us to look for Things exceeding great and glorious; even for such events as put a new Face on all God's past Dispensations. (See the following Sermons on the Wisdom of God in the Permission of Sin.)"[28] When the saints could picture the proper relation between the present evil times and the final deliverance; when they could finally

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[28] Ibid., p. 66n.

understand that there was a necessary connection between the two, then they would recognize and even rejoice in God's decision to let sin into the world. Hopkins summed up the Calvinist position quite clearly: "The Scripture don't represent the Work of Redemption, as what God has wrought to mend and patch up, as well as he could, a World that is spoil'd and ruin'd by Sin, as if there would have been more Good in the World, upon the whole, if there had been no Sin, and so no Redemption by Christ."[29]

That was the crux (the term is appropriate) of the Calvinist millennial theodicy: it was better to have the evil which brought with it Christ's redemption of the elect and the millennial triumph of the church than not to have Christ and the history of redemption at all. And that was a position many liberals found extreme. While Webster, Chauncy and others addressed the more specific question of original sin, Samuel Moody challenged the Calvinists on God's responsibility for evil.[30] Moody complained that Bellamy was too confident of the positive value of sin, and that it was not at all obvious that just because God allowed evil in the world "he should also think best there should be Sin in a State of Perfection and Holiness...." And that was implicitly what Bellamy was saying by claiming that the present world was the best one God could possibly have made. The most any sensible

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[29]Hopkins, Sin, p. 9.

[30]Samuel Moody, An Attempt to Point Out the Fatal and Pernicious Consequences of the Rev. Mr. Joseph Bellamy's Doctrines (Boston, 1759).

divine could admit was "that God is holy;—hates Sin—cannot be the Author of it; and therefore the Creature must."[31]

Of course, if men were directly responsible for sin, it could be argued without offending the Deity that this world was not the best possible creation after all. So Moody proceeded to do what Bellamy and Hopkins would have considered unthinkable: suggest arguments "which incline me to think, it would have been most for God's Glory, and the Happiness of the Creation, had moral Evil never been introduced into this System." If Adam and Eve had never fallen, "compleat Order and Harmony" would have still remained in the universe, an alternative that was surely more desirable than the present one. Otherwise, why had God placed them in such a perfect situation in the first place? "And if it was best, they should be loyal, obedient and happy, I cannot see how it was best they should rebel and be miserable."[32] Moody followed out the corollaries of his suppositions until they led straight to Bellamy's millennial calculus. If Adam had not fallen, sin and death would be unknown and all creatures could have obeyed more perfectly the command to be fruitful and multiply. Since "Mr. Bellamy is so dexterous in arithmetical Calculations, he may, for his own Satisfaction, compute how many there must have been now in the World; and whether they would not have so greatly exceeded in Number as

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[31] Ibid., pp. 7, 8n.

[32] Ibid., pp. 19-22.

to have made the Quantity of Happiness, in the sum, superior to what it could be even on his own Hypothesis...." Moody anticipated the traditions of modern scholars and saved his most waspish criticisms for a footnote, where he called the computations "so wildly absurd" that they needed no refutation. He only suggested that "those formidable Rows of Figures be reduc'd to 000's, a Coalescence of which into one great O...if of no other Advantage, will facilitate the Work of the Printer."[33]

Moody's conclusion was that most of the arguments in the Wisdom of God were as unreasonable as the computations in the millennial calculus. But Bellamy and Hopkins were not inclined to listen to Reason. They remained steadfastly convinced that the incontrovertible history laid out in the Bible was worth infinitely more than the frail theories of rational philosophy. As a result, they continued to cling to the promises of the prophecies in difficult times and to the history of redemption as a sure proof of God's sovereign wisdom in the permission of sin.

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[33] Ibid., p. 23n. Moody was not the only one who failed to buy Bellamy's math. Israel Dewey embroiled his pastor Samuel Hopkins in an argument over the wisdom of God in the permission of sin, and complained that Bellamy "computes like a Merchant Profit and Loss by Permission of Sin" to show "that Sin will prove 9600 millions [souls] clear Gain & Profit to the Universe." Stiles, Literary Diary, I, 280. Stiles noted that although the argument occurred ten years before Hopkins' dismissal, it may well have been one of the factors which began to turn his people against him.

II

Old Lights did not feel the need to defend God's honor after the manner of the Calvinists, but they did have to square their conception of his over-ruling providence with the threatening turn of events which confronted them in the mid-1750's. Liberals and Calvinists alike found themselves at the edge of a war whose outcome would determine the ultimate master of the North American continent. Although the English had been working as aggressively as the French to gain a decisive hegemony in the backcountry, most colonists were naturally inclined to see France, that "Limb of the Mother of Harlots," as the villain of the piece. Ever since the time of Louis XIV, she had "never failed to improve every Advantage to aggrandize herself," reflected one minister, ruefully noting that as a result, Britain found herself constantly placed as "a Weight on the Wings of France."[34] Aaron Burr's discourse on the subject in 1755 was typical in its fear of dark and deep laid French plans. With the establishment of Fort Duquesne on the Ohio, France had managed to close the final link between the St. Lawrence and the Mississippi in her campaign of encirclement. What was to stop her now from launching a secret offense before formally declaring war? If Britain did not act quickly, the consequences would

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[34] Amos Adams, Songs of Victory (Boston, 1759), pp. 18-19. This reflection was made near the conclusion of the war, but is typical of the attitude towards France throughout the conflict.

be grim: "Our Sea-port Towns sack'd, and land in Ashes!—Our Country ravaged! our Houses plunder'd!... Our Wives and Daughters delivered to the Lusts and Fury of a lawless Soldiery!—Our helpless Babes dashed against the Stones!"[35]

Quite a few congregations were provided with the same frightening vision of prosperous colonies reduced to ruins.[36] In many ministers' eyes, there was a good chance England might find herself forced out of the New World, leaving the surviving colonists to the whims of an arbitrary papist government. All of which might seem a rather pessimistic assessment in light of the oft professed belief that antichrist had been gradually falling for several centuries. But of course Satan raged as he fell, and for a while, the French and Indian war proved he could rage with considerable success.

England as usual managed to do everything in her power to lose the conflict before finally turning around to win it. Braddock was routed in his attempt to take Fort Duquesne. Governor Shirley, headed for Fort Niagara, got only as far as Oswego. Admiral Boscawen was unable to defeat the French fleet in the St. Lawrence. The colonies were so desperate for good news, they interpreted William Johnson's inconclusive skirmishes around Crown Point as a victory. And the next two years were even worse. Montcalm took the offensive

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[35]Aaron Burr, A Discourse delivered at New-Ark (New York, 1755), p. 40.

[36]Such rhetoric was common in sermons of the period. See, e.g., Theodorus Freylinghuysen, Wars and Rumors of Wars (New York, 1755), p. 18.

and captured Oswego in September; Indians, impressed by French victories, continued their raids on outlying settlements, particularly in Pennsylvania. English stock just about hit bottom when Montcalm occupied Fort William Henry on Lake George in August, 1757, threatening "a dreadful Irruption with Fire and Sword into the Bowels of our Country." As one minister later reminded his congregation, "You can't have forgotten the Surprize and Consternation of that Day.... We were ready to give up all for lost."[37]

Only with the capture of Louisbourg in July, 1758, did England begin her string of victories—Duquesne, Niagara, Crown Point, Ticonderoga—which led to the climactic reduction of Quebec in September, 1759. To many observers, it seemed as if a desperate situation had been transformed almost miraculously into a time of jubilant rejoicing. Of course, the turnabout was actually less dramatic. In retrospect, it is easy enough to see that France would have been hard put to reduce the colonies to ashes and leave in the wake of their forceful entry a growing tribe of unwanted French bastards. But believers who were familiar with the prophetic patterns of history knew that the world's redemption came only through a cycle of trials for the faithful, culminated by the climactic tests of the slain witnesses and the battle of Armageddon. Undoubtedly, the present war was one of the many trials leading to ultimate victory. But

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[37] Adams, Songs of Victory, p. 23.

which one? Was it merely a preparatory struggle, like others that had come before? Or could it perhaps be the beginning of the last major rage of the beast, who would leave the faithful dead in the streets for three and a half days (Rev. 11:1-13)? In the opening years of the war, the answer to that question was not at all clear.

Such a mood of uncertainty may well have sparked a renewed interest in the Signs of the Times. Whatever the reasons, more than the usual quota of prophetic tracts appeared in the second half of the 1750's, ranging from considered expositions by major figures to more obscure ramblings by men of lesser rank.

The Reverend David Imrie was among those of the latter category. Imrie tended a flock in Annandale, Scotland, and had not paid much attention to the prophecies until prodded by the hopes aroused through the Concert of Prayer. His subsequent investigations into prophetic numbers led him to make some startling conclusions in a letter to a friend, first published in Edinburgh in 1755 and a year later in the colonies. Imrie argued that the last events before Christ's coming were nearer than people suspected. The conversion of the Jews and Gentiles, the fall of antichrist, the introduction of the millennium were all to take place in the next forty years. This seemed like good news indeed, since the "dreadful days" that were "coming on the earth" would be particularly directed towards the Roman Catholic Babylon. But Imrie also noted that before the whore fell, power would be given

her "to distress the protestant churches by wars and persecutions." And only then would the faithful understand the passage in the Revelation which spoke of martyrs made white by the blood of the Lamb: "OH! the blessed meaning contained under that expression made white; it means no less than that in these trying times they shall be able to stand with firmness and constancy to the cause of Christ...and shall be honoured to die the martyrs death...."[38]

Imrie would not commit himself to a definite date for the beginning of these persecutions, but believed it would be within seven years after the date of his letter, 1754. When the judgments began, fully two-thirds of the world would be cut off, while the remaining saints would be gathered into a "place of safety." Or at least relative safety; Imrie felt sure no "preternatural judgments" would be allowed to touch the faithful. They might have to put up with a few natural ones, like famine, sword and pestilence, but these would be inflicted only insofar as the divine plan required. After all, "as by the oeconomy of nature, silver cannot be brought out of ore, but by means of the furnace, so by the oeconomy of providence, the day of blessedness cannot be brought about, but by the means of the preceding days of judgment."[39]

By the time Imrie's letter reached the colonies, his predictions were striking some people as being ominously

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[38] A Letter from the Reverend Mr. David Imrie (Boston, 1756), pp. 5-7.

[39] Ibid., pp. 8-9.

close to the mark. A note accompanying the pamphlet informed the publisher that Imrie had previously discussed the earthquakes of 1750 and 1751 with friends and suggested that even more prodigious ones were on their way. And shortly after came the disasters at Lisbon and New England! "Mr Imrie further thinks," the publisher added, that "'The present Commotions between Us and the French are a beginning of the Judgments spoke of in his printed Letter.'"[40] But many ministers must have remained skeptical. Imrie's predictions were uncomfortably definite, and left little room for error. Jonathan Edwards commended the Scotsman's "disposition to be searching into the prophecies of Scripture," but refused to commit himself to wholehearted approval, remarking that events had often before humbled divines who "have been over forward to fix the times and the seasons" of accomplishment. Edwards only hoped that Imrie would see fit to publish more detailed scriptural proofs supporting his conjectures.[41]

Christopher Love and Richard Clarke provided even more precipitous timetables than Imrie. Love's forecast for the 1750's and 1760's gained added weight by virtue of his having expired on the chopping block a century earlier under the auspices of the Cromwell regime. At that time he had left his followers a list of predictions which one New England publisher evidently thought would make interesting reading in

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[40] Ibid., p. 17.

[41] Letter of Edwards to William McCulloch in Dwight, ed., Works, I, 553.

1759. The list was short and to the point:

Great Earthquakes and Commotions by Sea and Land	1756
Great Wars in Germany and America	1757
Destruction of Popery, Babylon's Fall	1758
Anger of God Against the Wicked	1759
God will be known	1760
A great Man arises, Stars wander, Moon as blood	1761
Asia, Africa, America will tremble	1762
Great Earthquake over all the World	1763
God known by all; general reformation[42]	

In the same year Richard Clarke took note of Love's calculations and supplied some of his own. The results were as confusing in grammar and syntax as they were in arithmetic, but it was at least clear that Clarke thought the slaying of the witnesses would begin in 1758 or 1759, followed by speedy accomplishments of other vials and plagues in the next five or six years.[43] The tract appeared in Charleston and Philadelphia as well as in Boston, and attracted enough attention to elicit an equally tortuous rebuttal entitled From a Folio Manuscript, in the Archive of a Certain Aged Gormogon...Questions and Answers Are Extracted...with the Author (Harne Kileo) his Leave....[44] Fortunately, Clarke never attempted

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[42] The Strange and Wonderful Predictions of Mr. Christopher Love (Boston, 1759), Broadside. Love's predictions surfaced again later in the century, being reprinted in 1791, 1793, 1794, 1795, 1797 and 1798.

[43] Richard Clarke, The Prophetic Numbers of Daniel and John Calculated (Boston, 1759), pp. 8, 20.

[44] From a Folio Manuscript, in the Archive of a Certain Aged Gormogon... (Boston, 1759). A Gormogon (the term is pseudo-Chinese) was a member of a society imitating the Freemasons, founded early in the eighteenth century. The main thrust of Kileo's rebuttal was that Love and Clarke were too hasty in their predictions, and that most events of the last days would not be fulfilled until the 1950's.

to answer the Aged Gormogon.

No doubt many of the more discerning members of the public dismissed these productions as little more than extravagant diversions. But that was because the would-be prophets were too overconfident in their detailed predictions, not because they forecast strange and trying times for New England. The disasters of the war, coming as they did on the heels of the earthquake of 1755, imparted a sense of crisis to discussions of the prophecies; a note of urgency which was as much present in the sermons of respectable ministers as in the peregrinations of obscure cranks.

"Some great event is nigh at hand," warned Jonathan Parsons in 1756. The recent "great earthquakes," the "fearful sights, and great signs that have been in the heavens" as well as the current "distress of nations" were all undoubtedly warnings of greater calamities. Timothy Harrington echoed Parsons' thoughts. "The awful Shakings in the World natural, together with the present Commotions and Convulsions of the World moral, seem to portend...some considerable Event near opening upon us," he said.[45] The scriptures suggested that Babylon would be "posses'd of Power and Grandeur, immediately preceding her destruction"; and in light of the circumstances,

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[45] Jonathan Parsons, Good News from a Far Country (Portsmouth, 1756), p. 168; Timothy Harrington, Prevailing Wickedness, and distressing Judgments (Boston, 1756), p. 26. For similar sentiments, see Gilbert Tennant, The Good Man's Character and Reward Represented...together with Reflections on the Presages of Approaching Calamities (Philadelphia, 1756), pp. 23, 39.

Harrington felt obliged to raise the distressing question of "whether [the whore] shall not repossess the Grandeur, which she had before the Reformation, and add America too? And whether the present Aspects of divine Providence are not introductory to such a dreadful Scene?" John Mellen confronted the men of Lancaster with the same possibility as they gathered for a general muster and inspection of arms. Babylon had not yet fallen—that was certain—but how high she might rise, or "how she may yet surfeit in the blood of the saints" was not easy to tell. There was a distinct possibility that New England might soon find itself without the true gospel. "Our land may be given to the beast," he concluded; "the inhabitants to the sword, the righteous to the fire of martyrdom, our wives to ravishment, and our sons and our daughters to death & torture!"[46]

The manner in which the war sharpened and focused the eschatological perspective can be seen especially well in a comparison of two discussions of the prophecies, one by John Gill and the other by Aaron Burr. Gill was an English Baptist who had delivered a series of three sermons during the early 1750's based on a text out of Isaiah 21: "Watchman, What of the Night?" The sermons were published in the colonies for the first time in 1756—the same year, as it happened, that President Burr delivered his own thoughts on the

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[46]Harrington, Prevailing Wickedness, p. 27; John Mellen, The Duty of All to be Ready for future impending Events (Boston, 1756), pp. 19-20.

identical text.[47]

The setting in Isaiah was a familiar one, with the captive and downtrodden Jews begging the prophetic watchman for an indication of when they might be delivered. The reply they received was the usual combination of darkness and light: "The Watchman said, The Morning Cometh, and also the Night." Gill explained, predictably enough, that the answer illustrated the "constant succession and revolution" of mornings and nights throughout history: the glory of primitive Christianity followed by declension; the success of Constantine followed by Mahomet and antichrist. What remained to be determined was where the church stood in the latest cycle. Gill's reading of the prophecies led him to believe that the world was heading towards the blackest of nights. "Signs of the even-tide" were manifest and would "shortly appear yet more and more." It would not be long, in fact, before the final slaying of the witnesses was accomplished. True, some expositors had suggested the punishment had already been meted out, perhaps by Queen Mary's burnings at Smithfield or the

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[47]John Gill, Three Sermons (4th ed.; Boston, 1756); Aaron Burr, Sermon Preached before the Synod of New-York (New York, 1756). Burr may not have read the Boston edition before he delivered his own sermon in August, but the similarity of subject matter, as well as some structural parallels, suggest that he may well have had access to one of the earlier English editions. (Compare, e.g., Gill's discussion of antichrist's fall and the woe trumpets, pp. 29-31, with Burr's discussion of the same, pp. 29-30; also the historical summaries, Gill, pp. 20-25, and Burr, pp. 13-18.) Gill's three sermons, preached December 27, 1750, January 1, 1752, and December 27, 1752, were originally published separately, but went through many editions, on into the nineteenth century.

reign of James II. Either of these periods corresponded roughly with the three and a half years predicted by John. But Gill thought these interpretations were mistaken. The slaying would have to be complete, and the protestant religion universally rejected. As long as some "civil or worldly establishments" remained where reformed churches were "established by the laws of the countries," there were worse times ahead when the light of the gospel would be "wholly withdrawn."[48]

The dark night would last only a short time however, after which antichrist would fall, the witnesses rise and "a time of great prosperity" begin, with Christ having "dominion from sea to sea." That, as anyone could guess, was the millennium—except that in Gill's opinion, everyone was guessing wrong. He followed the time-honored expositor's practice of rejecting an obvious, simple explanation when a more convoluted one would do better; in this case, his own novel theory of a double millennium. The first era was indeed a "spiritual reign" of Christ, but that would be followed by another period of declension and the conflagration. Only then would Christ arrive (on the Mount of Olives, where he had ascended) to begin his thousand year "personal reign."[49]

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[48] Gill, Three Sermons, pp. 26-29.

[49] Ibid., pp. 70-73; also 33-34. In effect, Gill seemed to be trying to have his cake and eat it, by combining Mede's theory of a literal resurrection and day of judgment which lasted through the thousand years with the version proposed by men like Henry More, who posited a metaphorical first resurrection and less exalted thousand year reign.

Burr steered clear of any strained theories of a double millennium, and instead adhered to the more conventional ideas of Moses Lowman.[50] But aside from that, his sermon followed Gill's general points quite closely. He agreed that "the darkest part of Night yet remains," and that "the glorious Times...will be preceded with a Season of the sorest Calamity and Distress."[51] And that meant Gill's other conclusion followed inescapably: despite Jonathan Edwards' publicly expressed hopes to the contrary, the witnesses had not been slain. The point had to be made with circumspection; Edwards, after all, was a good friend and a father-in-law to boot. But the evidence seemed clear, and Burr politely presented his objections. Many of them were based on chronological calculations designed to demonstrate that the 1260 days of prophesying in sackcloth had not fully elapsed. But behind the estimates and conjectures was a more basic point. The slaying would be the worst persecution in the church's history, and it belonged at the end of the beast's reign because only in that way would it fit the accepted pattern of redemption. God's usual method was to "prepare his Church and his People for extraordinary Favours, by extraordinary Trials, and in the present corrupt State of Things, it seems

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[50]Burr, A Sermon, pp. 30-32. Burr argued that the theory of a literal first resurrection had too many difficulties which were irreconcilable with scripture. He also concurred with the judgment of Bellamy and Edwards that there was no need for a 360,000 year reign in order for Christ to have more subjects than Satan.

highly proper that it should be so."[51]

All these points merely echoed the ones made in Gill's sermons. What differentiated the two pieces most strikingly was the sharp edge the specific events of the war gave to Burr's commentary. Gill predicted dark times, but confined himself to general disparagement of theological liberals and the growing influence of popery in England. Warnings of approaching woes were interlarded with the usual clichés encouraging steadfastness ("quit ye like men"; "be strong"; "stand fast in the faith"). For Burr the situation was different; the danger immediate. Britain was the "last stronghold" against the antichristian powers; if France now managed to subdue her, the rest of the world would be no match for the armies of the beast. And the present state of "Publick Affairs" certainly wore "a dark Aspect." The disasters in the colonies, of course, were duly enumerated: Braddock's defeat, the loss of Osewgo, the Indians who scornfully noted that the French acted like men, the English like women. But European matters seemed equally grim. The Queen of Hungary, England's old ally, had basely joined with the enemy, and Poland was flirting with the same idea. Spain too was waiting in the wings ready to declare war when the opportunity afforded. The conclusion was obvious: "have we not reason to

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[51]Burr, A Sermon, pp. 21-25. Although Burr did not have Edwards' treatise directly at hand when replying to the objections, he later reviewed it, and noted that even the scheme outlined in the Humble Attempt called for a "remaining mighty conflict" (p. 26n).

fear, that God will purify his Churches in the Furnace, that they may come forth as Gold tried and refined? Can we expect, that so much Dross and Corruption, as is now found among us, will be purged off any other Way?"[52]

Burr thus joined Mellen, Harrington and many others in assuming the signs of the times warranted a gloomy set of prognostics—gloomier, in fact, than almost any which had been offered by New Englanders in the last half century. Even Cotton Mather, a man always ready to make the worst of a bad situation, had never seriously considered the possibility that the Reformed church would be run off the face of the earth. He believed the slaying of the witnesses had been accomplished, and interpreted any news he received of reformations throughout Europe as "glorious anticipations" of the coming kingdom. In 1756, few students of the Revelation were willing to argue as hopefully as either Mather or Edwards had about the witnesses.

Yet if the forecast was gloomier, the way out of the dilemma remained the same, since the afflictive model of progress thrived on trouble. Ministers consoled their flocks as they always had, by holding out the millennium as a time which would offset present evils, and by identifying the present sufferings, however extreme, with the perpetual trials of the church. Thus Theodorus Frelinghuysen explained to the 1755 Crown Point expedition that although Christ himself

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[52]Burr, A Sermon, pp. 26-30.

had listed "Wars and Rumors of Wars" as inevitable burdens of the church, the pitched battles were only one part of a greater canvas of miseries:

> While it hath been my Business to see the Visions of the Almighty, I have seen horrible Sights.—I have seen Impiety and Oppression successful; Innocence I have seen oppressed and abused. Those who feared the Lord, and eschewed Evil, I have seen agonizing under Affliction upon Affliction, while at the same time, such as had not the Fear of God before their Eyes, nor his Greatness upon their Hearts, were elevated with Prosperity.—The wicked and ungodly I have seen raised to Wealth and Honour, to Posts and Profits, while the sincere Worshipper of the Deity was as a despised Lamp, as one mocked of his Neighbour, and laughed to scorn.... All these Things, and worse than these, mine Eyes have seen, mine Ears have heard, and myself have felt....

These miseries would be insupportable were it not that God worked to bring "Light out of Darkness, and Life out of Death...." Appropriately, Frelinghuysen used the illustration of the conflagration to make his point. It was frightening to think that the globe would be swept by fire; "but that it will serve to purify and renew it, makes more than ample Amends."[53] Amos Adams took up the same refrain, noting that Christ said He came not to bring peace but the sword. For that reason, Christians not only shared in calamities common to mankind, they were actually "the peculiar Object of the implacable Malice of the World"—from the first trials of early believers down through the slaying of the witnesses.[54] In such trying times, even a good man was likely to question

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[53] Frelinghuysen, Wars and Rumors of Wars, pp. 24, 3-4.

[54] Amos Adams, The Expediency and Utility of War (Boston, 1759), pp. 1, 6.

the reason for all the suffering.

> When you read and hear of the Calamities God has permitted upon the World by the Sword; when you think how many Thousands, I had almost said Millions had been sacrificed to the Pride of Princes...you are ready to ask, 'What are the Reasons of God's Judgments; what ends, agreeable to divine Wisdom, are answer'd?...'[55]

The end above all ends (in this world at least) was the millennial reign, which formed the basis for the "hopes we entertain of Deliverance from the State of Woe." Even though Adams knew the present generation would probably die "long e'er that Day," and even though men were not able to understand perfectly the steps needed "to bring on that most perfect State of the World," the grand vision alone gave "an enlarged View...of the benevolent Designs of the Father of Mercies!" Frelinghuysen also viewed the millennium as the "one great Comfort" in his text, since it promised a time, however distant, when a peaceful world would not be "molested by Wars and Rumors of Wars."[56] And Thomas Barnard, although careful to disassociate himself from the Calvinist view of God's wisdom in the permission of sin, still constructed a theodicy which affirmed that corrective afflictions were the indispensable tools needed to bring about the millennial

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[55] Ibid., p. 15.

[56] Ibid., pp. 28-30. Frelinghuysen, Wars and Rumors of Wars, p. 26. Frelinghuysen would not commit himself definitely, but thought it probable the thousand year reign would not come until around the year 2000. He preferred Whiston's theory of a comet setting off the final conflagration; but unlike Whiston, moved the fire to the close of the millennium (pp. 27-29).

"consummation of all Things."[57] The judgments of the present age could be justified for their own sake, simply because they served to chastize the wicked and refine the saints. "But how glorious," he concluded, "if the present State of Things be but one Step in the progressive Scheme of Happiness for which he has designed this World, in its various Ages?" It was this larger vision which Barnard and others kept in mind when the nation found itself "surrounded with all the Horrors of War, and dejected by a Train of past ill-Successes in it...."[58]

Thus the millennial theodicy helped prepare New England for the worst; assured her, as Timothy Harrington said, that even if "God hath absolutely determined that the Besom of Destruction shall pass over [the country]; and that these Provinces shall become the Possession of our Enemies; and Appendage of Rome; yet our Interest shall be safe." But there was always one other possibility. Perhaps God had not absolutely determined on destruction; perhaps his cup of wrath might be allowed to pass. Even as Burr told his listeners that the

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[57]Thomas Barnard, A Sermon Preached to the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company (Boston, 1758), pp. 7, 17; also 11-12. Barnard's sermon is particularly notable for the care it takes to discuss some of the philosophical arguments more traditionally associated with theodicies. In doing so Barnard discredited the idea that God's wisdom was beyond the ken of men, or that the doctrine of original sin could explain evil—a solution which cut the Gordian knot rather "than untying it" (pp. 8-10).

[58]Ibid., pp. 17, 5-6.

times were "so far from discouraging" because "it seems as if Things were come to the last Extremity, and that it was time for God to appear," he was hoping that last extremity had not come, and that a reformation of morals (as well as a new commander of British troops) might be sufficient to drive the French from the land.[59] And John Mellen allowed that if God willed it, a successful war might open the way for conversion of the heathen and the spread of Christianity throughout the continent. All of which "would be glorious indeed, resembling the state of the church in the latter days."[60] These sentiments perforce remained little more than guarded hopes, even into the summer of 1759. But with the capture of Quebec and Montreal, the colonies were confronted with the astonishing possibility that the Harlot might soon be driven out of North America. "The American DUNKIRK and the Western BABYLON are fallen!" proclaimed Mellen.[61]

Jonathan Mayhew chose prophetic texts to celebrate both the reduction of Quebec and the victory at Montreal a

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[59]Harrington, Prevailing Wickedness, p. 31; Burr, A Sermon, pp. 38, 41-43. See also William Hobby's cautious hope that Babylon's fall was not very far off. William Hobby, The Happiness of a People (Boston, 1758), p. 22.

[60]Mellen, Duty, pp. 21-22. Mellen stopped short of identifying this period with the millennium, although not because he thought the conflagration intervened. When the last fire came, so would the general resurrection, and the saints would go directly to the "everlasting" heaven. John Mellen, Fifteen Discourses upon Doctrinal, Connected Subjects (Boston, 1765), pp. 498-500.

[61]John Mellen, A Sermon Preached at the West Parish in Lancaster (Boston, 1760), p. 16.

year later, since it seemed evident that the late military successes helped forward "the kingdom of Christ, the extension thereof, and its establishment in its power and purity throughout the earth." The prophecies had revealed God's "unalterable purpose, in due time, tho' gradually, to consume and destroy the beast and false prophet," and judging from "some late occurrences in Europe and elsewhere" the destruction of antichrist might well be "at no very great distance from the present."[62] Mayhew was reluctant to see the victories as fulfillment of any specific passage of the Revelation, but the prophecies gave a clear, if general, outline of the remaining events to be accomplished; and the British success fit nicely into the scenario.[63]

First of all, the surrender of France might well be only the beginning of more hopeful developments in Europe. If Spain and Portugal took proper note of the object lesson confronting them, they might soon openly break with Rome. And with knowledge and learning constantly on the increase, many of the common people in popish countries would be discovering how badly they had been treated. That might well lead to revolutions. Secondly, the victory in the New World gave the English access to a multitude of aboriginals who had previously been under the evil influence of Roman priests.

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[62]Jonathan Mayhew, Two Discourses Delivered October 9, 1760 (Boston, 1760), p. 9; Two Discourses Delivered October 25, 1759 (Boston, 1759), pp. 49-50.

[63]Mayhew, Two Discourses, 1760, p. 63.

With France gone, the Indians would not be able to play off one white country against another, and so would inevitably become more "tractable and submissive"; more open to receiving the protestant truth.[64] The opening of a whole continent made it even possible to conceive of a grand, future American empire ("I do not mean an independent one") where the people were religious, the Indians converted, and the nation prosperous. That, by Mayhew's reckoning, was still more than a century away, but New Englanders could rejoice that progress was being made towards it.

> Even these days, my brethren, wherein we live...are far more joyful than any which our fathers saw, tho' far less happy than those times which busy fancy, the love of my dear country, and charity to unborn posterity, would paint out to me, and almost compel me to believe are actually to follow.[65]

Other Thanksgiving sermons were equally hopeful about the future. Samuel Langdon recalled England's long career as the Elect Nation (to use William Haller's phrase), constantly protected by "almost miraculous" providences. The latest blessings were merely "a prelude to further favors" and a token of assurance that God would "continue his care of the reformed churches, till all the prophecies of the new testa-

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[64] Ibid., pp. 52-60.

[65] Mayhew, Two Discourses, 1759, pp. 60-61. It is perhaps ironic, considering the case that has been made by some historians for a progressive New Light post-millennialism, that Mayhew's conception of history here comes closer to typical 19th century models of progress than any other New England minister of the period. Similar tendencies, though less marked, are present in the theodicy of Thomas Barnard (another liberal). See Barnard, A Sermon, particularly p. 7, and Part II in general.

ment against the mystical Babylon are accomplished...." Of course the good fortune was not merely intended for Great Britain, but for the whole "protestant interest." And the success obtained by Prussia, combined with developments on other fronts, indicated that antichrist's fall "may be much nearer than we imagine."[66] Similarly, Samuel Haven and Nathaniel Appleton rejoiced that God was pouring out his vials of wrath on the beast, and that religion could now spread freely throughout the land.[67]

With such prospects opening up, believers could breathe a sigh of relief. The cup of wrath had indeed been allowed to pass. Thanksgiving sermons talked about judgments, but they were more often the vials being poured on the enemy, less often the trials which the witnesses were to have undergone. But while students of the prophecies understandably dispensed for the moment with the gloom of the previous years, they did not reject the pattern of history of which that gloom was a part. God had delivered his people in this war as he had in the past; by first testing them in the fire of conflict. "Thus we were disappointed and humbled from year to year," explained Samuel Langdon:

> almost everything went against us; the enemy gain'd ground, fortified and secur'd every pass into their

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[66] Samuel Langdon, Joy and Gratitude to God for...the Conquest of Quebec (Portsmouth, 1760), pp. 17, 23-25, 42-43.

[67] Samuel Haven, Joy and Salvation by Christ; his Arm displayed in the Protestant Cause (Portsmouth, 1763), p. 39; Nathaniel Appleton, A Sermon preached October 9...Occasioned by the Surrender of Montreal (Boston, 1760), pp. 5-7, 36.

> own country, grew more and more animated.... But when God had thus prov'd and humbled and convinc'd us that the race is not to the swift...His Providence bro't about a change of measures at Home, the happy effects of which soon reach'd America.[68]

So everyone rejoiced, but not without tempering their joy with a remembrance of the "dark Appearances preceding our late Successes." As Thomas Foxcroft pointed out, even in a Thanksgiving sermon it was essential to "sing both of Mercy and of Judgment."[69] The two qualities were bound inseparably together—not only in Thanksgiving sermons but in the work of redemption itself. The Biblical history of the past and the prophecies of the future all pointed to that necessary connection: between mercy and judgment, deliverance and affliction, the millennial reign and the slain witnesses. During the trying times of the 1750's when the beast seemed ready to prevail, it was no small comfort to be able to fit current events into those larger patterns of history.

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All histories should have an end, but the proper conclusion to this one is the end of history—something Providence has not yet seen fit to provide. This dissertation is thus forced to conclude by breaking into "the connected, successive events" of the work of redemption (to use Edwards'

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[68] Langdon, Joy, pp. 37-38. For similar characterizations of the war as typical of the whole deliverance from the depths of despair pattern, see also Appleton, A Sermon, p. 23; Haven, Joy and Salvation, pp. 19-31.

[69] Thomas Foxcroft, Grateful Reflexions (Boston, 1760), p. 34.

description of it), and in so doing, disrupt the interrelationships which helped to give the drama its "admirable contexture and harmony of the whole." Admittedly, the peace which was won by the expenditure of blood and treasure led to the quarrel over who was to pay for it, and forced Americans to question whether Britain was really the nation elected to superintend the American millennial empire that Jonathan Mayhew described. And the victories which appeared as a mortal wound to France's vaunted empire would have to be reconsidered in light of the antichrist of infidelity which arose out of the shambles of the French revolution. Certainly the windings of the history of redemption would prove to be interconnected in ways which the faithful could not have imagined in 1763.

Yet if the peace at Paris was as much a beginning as an ending, New Englanders at least perceived the victory over France as the completion of one section of the larger drama: another reflection of the pattern of light out of darkness which would characterize the final deliverance. And from our point of view, the drama has come to a plausible halting place because the reconstruction of millennial logic undertaken in the preceding chapters has provided enough information to permit a resolution of some of the quandaries with which our study began.

The investigation initially advanced an assumption and a question. It assumed that many eighteenth century divines shared an interest in Biblical prophecies about the latter

days; and it questioned whether this interest affected in any consistent way New Englanders' perceptions of their social situation. The question was meant to be taken seriously—and not merely as a straw man to be knocked handily about as the dissertation progressed. That millennial interpretations might be (like Rorschach blots) merely reflections of social concerns rather than determinants of them seemed a definite possibility, especially in light of the common admission that prophecies were naturally obscure and hence needed to be interpreted by events.[70]

The prophecies, however, did not turn out to be as amorphous as Rorschach blots. They possessed a specific social function acknowledged by all expositors, and that was to serve as promises that God would ultimately deliver his church; as "cordials" for the times when the faithful were suffering in their war with Satan. Sometimes this millennial rhetoric functioned in concrete and intensely personal ways, as in Cotton Mather's ecstatic reassurances through particular faiths that despite the opinions of his enemies, he would play an instrumental part in bringing in the kingdom; or as in Gilbert Tennent's words of encouragement (it was darkest

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[70] Readers have a right to be skeptical of a dissertator's highminded professions regarding straw men. But one indication that this question was indeed taken seriously is my original inclination to accept the Rorschach explanation as a convincing one. See James W. Davidson, "Searching for the Millennium: Problems for the 1790's and the 1970's," New England Quarterly, XLV, No. 2 (1972), pp. 241-61; esp. 255, 257-58, where the treatment of the problem conflicts with the answers given in this dissertation.

before the dawn) to Peter Thacher, whose barren ministry stood in sharp contrast with the successful revivals all around him. The same rhetoric functioned well to provide corporate reassurance of a similar kind, as when Thomas Foxcroft used Robert Fleming's book to reassure New Lights that oppositions to the true gospel were always to be expected; or when Aaron Burr (and many other ministers) comforted New Englanders during the darkest moments of the war with France. And again, the same rhetoric functioned in a more intellectualized setting when Bellamy and Hopkins used the history of redemption as their centerpiece in the construction of a formal theodicy demonstrating God's wisdom in the permission of sin.

We can make the terms of our argument even stronger. Not only did the millennial perspective play an important part in explaining existing social realities, it also worked to bend those social realities into line with the situations it predicted. The prophecies warned that agents of the devil and carnal men would oppose the gospel in all ages; and when New Lights used such unconsciously grating rhetoric to describe those who had reservations about the Awakening, they virtually guaranteed the existence of an aggrieved and vocal opposition. Both the smaller model of conversion and the larger history of redemption actually worked to create the polarized conditions they anticipated. In another context, the same vision of history united providences of both the moral and physical world under the rubric of God's judgment,

and thus insured that disasters such as earthquakes would contribute to the feeling that history was approaching its consummation in accordance with the laws of the afflictive model of progress. Surely that was the case when the French and Indian war followed shortly on the heels of the tremors of 1755. And afterwards ministers would recount how the North American continent was finally delivered from the hands of the beast only after England had been forced to a position of utmost extremity. In their telling, divines stretched realities to fit the stylized framework of redemptive history.

The history of redemption thus helped to shape the social realities of its time, but not always in a manner calculated to hasten the paradise promised for the thousand year reign. In the end, that shortcoming is not surprising, especially in light of the emphasis on a millennial theodicy of comfort. New Englanders would continue to hope that the final years of peace and prosperity were approaching, but until that time came, they would use the prophecies to defend an omnipotent and benevolent God in a world filled with the power and malevolence of the wicked. The millennium certainly held out a future where it would be possible to attain the perfection of man; but more important, it did so in a way which provided a present where it would be possible to maintain the perfection of God.

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